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BEADLE'S

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OR,

Golconda, the Gladiator.

BY E. L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

ONE NIGHT NOT LONG AGO.

"It's a mighty tough night!"

Bordered on the west and north by corners of New Mexico and Colorado, on the south by Texas, and on the east by Indian Territory and Kansas, is a strip of territory, consisting of nearly four million acres, known as the Neutral Strip, or No-Man's Land.

It belongs to no man. None of the surrounding States or Territories have jurisdiction over it. It has no established laws; every man with a

DICK AND THE GLADIATOR FACED EACH OTHER AND ONE CLASH OF STEEL WAS FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER.

gun is his own law-giver; it is a place of refuge for criminals and scalawags who find the States too warm for them; and, as a whole, is just the region for a man to visit who wants to wake up some morning and find himself over the border in spirit-land.

And yet, for all this, there are homes in No-Man's Land, families of respectability, that form a pleasant society among themselves, exclusive of the rougher element; but these homes, as a rule, have a few repeating-rifles in the house in case of emergency.

The principal town in this neutral territory is Beaver City, on the Beaver River.

It is much the same as all far-Western towns—rough-and-ready made, populated by a heterogeneous class of mortals, and comprising about seven hundred souls, whose chief occupation is farming.

The products of No-Man's Land, whether it be agricultural products or stock, seldom get beyond its borders.

A man takes up a claim, and in case no other man comes along who wants the claim and is able to enforce his desire for possession, the original claimant is "solid."

Visitors from the States are not looked upon with any particular favor by the rough element, and consequently there are frequent "scrimmages" and loss of life.

The expression which opens our story was uttered one wild, rainy night, in Tim Hale's place in Beaver City.

It may be well to add right here that a great many of the resorts of Beaver City are built of sod, especially the houses used as dwellings. To be sure there are a number of rough frame structures on Douglass avenue, the principal street of the town, but they are in the minority, and mostly used for business purposes, such as supply stores, saloons, gaming, and dance-houses.

Tim Hale's place was partly a dug-out in the hillside, and partly constructed of poles and sod.

It consisted of one room, which comprised bar-room, parlor and sleeping-room, had a floor of unplained boards, a few improvised tables and stools, an apology for a bed, and a big cupboard wherein Tim kept his cooking utensils, with which he furnished his own "grub," and the villainous whisky with which he served his customers.

The night that opens our story was one of the worst known in No-Man's Land, for years. The wind blew a very hurricane, and carried with it torrents of rain. It was intensely dark, and no one thought of being abroad, who could reasonably help it. Consequently, Tim Hale's dug-out, had its usual complement of patrons, who were gathered around the fire-place, where a roaring fire was blazing.

They were the scum of Beaver City, these men, bad to the core, and ready, at a moment's notice, for any act of violence.

There were Jim Oaks, Pete McCann, Jeff Oliver, Hank Hooper, Old Rocks, and Tom Heep, all known in Beaver as the Big Six.

They were likewise known to be thoroughbred desperadoes, and their acquaintance was little sought after by any of the reputable citizens.

Jim Oaks was the acknowledged leader of this gang—a big, six-foot ruffian, who made his brag that he had killed a dozen men, and that his heart was as black as his beard. It was he who had made the remark, which opens our story.

"Yas, et be a tough night," reiterated Tim Hale, who had just served a round of drinks and "chalked it down on the slate," until the gang made a haul. "Reckon thar ain't much doin' round town, to night."

"Well, no, 'cept drinkin' whisky," Oaks replied, grimly.

"Thar's a party over at Thornton's!" volunteered Jeff Oliver, a diminutive individual, red-bearded, and cross-eyed, who looked as if he had never had enough to eat.

"To blazes with Thornton and his party!" growled Oaks. "Et don't do us galoots any good. What I want to see is some feller with a fat pocket-book come along. Et's been two weeks sence a stranger showed up heer in Beaver, as was wu'th pluckin'!"

"That's so," assented Tom Heep. "Things begin to look desprit."

"Guess we'll have to make a descent on old Tom Thornton!" suggested Jeff Oliver.

"Not much!" Oaks replied, in disgust. "He's got a lot o' money, but he's got a place fer keepin' it, you can bet, whar no one will find it but himself. Heven't we tried the racket, an' failed?"

"Mebbe when the match comes off, tomorrow, he'll have some dust about him, for there'll be a big crowd in town, an' there'll be some lively bettin'!" Hank Hooper suggested.

"I'll bet my shirt the contest won't come off at all!" Oaks grunted. "There's not a man in the strip as kin hold a candle to Golconda, unless it's me, and it's no sure thing I shall enter the contest."

"Waal, I don't keer a continental cuss where it comes from," spoke up Tim Hale; "but, one thing is flat! You-uns must raise me some dust purty quick, or you won't get no more whisky in this place."

"Oh! we won't, hey?" sneered Oaks. "Waal, why not, Mister Hale?"

"'Cause there won't be none to give ye. The bar'l is empty, now, an' thar ain't much in the jugs. That's the how!"

"Oh!" Oaks returned, apologetically. "I didn't know that. Yes, boys, we must raise the wind to-morrow, somehow, fer et won't do to be 'thout whisky this kind o' weather."

And thus the gang chinned away, as they sat before the leaping blaze on the hearth and drank Tim Hale's "benzine" without paying for it.

Of all the occupants of the dug-out, but one had nothing to say. He maintained a stolid silence, and puffed away at his grimy clay pipe.

He was Old Rocks—one of the "characters" of Beaver City.

CHAPTER II.

THE ARRIVAL OF DICK.

OLD ROCKS, by birth, was a full-blooded Navajo Indian. Naturally treacherous, wily, and vicious, when sober, liquor had the effect of making him lazy, indolent and peaceable. As long as he could get what whisky he wanted, he smoked his pipe in quiet, but shut off his "booze" and there was not a more dangerous man in No-Man's Land.

He was a giant in size, a desperate fighter, and a crafty rascal in every respect; therefore, as he was feared by the average citizen of Beaver City, he usually got what drink he wanted; and, as a rule, more than he wanted or could stand.

Old Rocks had a family of two children—one a boy and the other a girl.

Golconda, the boy, was in reality a man. He was twenty-three years of age, lighter of complexion than his father, and possessed of a fine physique. In Beaver he was known as Golconda, the Gladiator, and right well he deserved the title, for, as yet, the man had not appeared who could best him.

He was a great wrestler, clever boxer, an unerring revolver and rifle-shot, and could wield the sword or throw the spear with the best.

In fact, having begun his education when but a child, in athletics, he was considered phenomenal.

Old Rocks's daughter, a maiden of eighteen, and lithe and agile as a fox, was named Singing Bird.

She possessed a petite, but well-rounded figure; a round, fair countenance of Anglo-Saxon cast, beautiful black eyes, nut-brown hair, rosy lips and cheeks, and pearly teeth that any woman would have envied.

Moreover, her complexion was so remarkably fair, and her features so unlike those of the Indian race, that many had doubts that she was the Navajo's child.

There was no way of verifying this suspicion, however, for no one knew where the family came from when they located in Beaver, a year before our story, and no one had yet found out.

Old Rocks and Golconda always seemed on the best of terms, and Singing Bird never betrayed any ill-feeling toward them.

She and Golconda furnished the family sustenance by their frequent hunting excursions, while Old Rocks hung about Tim Hale's place and guzzled whisky. Work he would not.

Finally, the winter which opens our story, approached, and a change came over Golconda and Old Rocks.

Through some inconceivable reason, both appeared to be desirous of getting rid of Singing Bird, and of leaving No-Man's Land. What their idea was they refused to disclose, and finally the matter developed into a mystery.

Upon top of this came a startling announcement that further increased this mystery. It was to the effect that, on a certain day, Golconda would hold a gladiatorial contest, and would meet all comers who wished to contest with him in his specialties. The entrance fee was to be fifty dollars, and the one grand capital prize was Singing Bird! That man who should succeed in defeating Golconda in each and every one of his gladiatorial feats, should have Singing Bird, the prettiest maiden in Beaver City.

Attached to this announcement, which was printed on paper, and scattered the length and breadth of No-Man's Land and into the borders of the States and Territories surrounding it, was a postscript by Singing Bird, by which she agreed to abide by her brother's arrangements.

As may be supposed, these circulars created great excitement everywhere they were distributed, and there promised to be a large crowd present.

A large tent, left in Englewood, Kansas, by a stranded circus company, had been hired and erected, and everything promised well for a day of excitement on the morrow—for the day following the one which opens our story was the one set for the contest.

And now, having made plain as far as possible the nature of our story, we will return to Tim Hale's resort.

Jim Oaks proposed to be one of the gladiator's contestants, and had already made his deposit of the nimble little fifty dollars.

Ruffian though he was, and perfectly fearless, he yet feared Golconda, but, for the sake of winning Singing Bird, he would attempt almost any feat or deed of violence.

So would many a man in No-Man's Land.

"D'ye know, Rocks, how many entries ther' are for to-morrow?" Oaks demanded, after a silence. "There's none as I have heard of, and I've heard the sheriff say as how Miss Morey told him that old Thornton intended to have the Singing Bird. To get her he will hev to put a Jim-dandy in the field!"

"And ye can bet yer life that when he puts up a man, Tom Thornton is going to enter one who will win him the S!"

"What?" asked Old Rocks, for the first time speaking. "Thornton take girl? Thornton never get girl, never get girl, unless he fight my son for her."

Heep laughed.

"Thornton won't fight," he said, "but he will have some one to help him, just the same. I hev heard he has sent for big Lige, but can't vouch for the truth of et."

"Thornton kin fight a little bit himself," remarked Oaks. "A man who has been through the experience he has ought to be able to handle himself. Why, he threw Jim Lane, the sheriff, with hardly a struggle,

and I allow he kin shoot, too. I ain't fond o' him, but he's no slouch on the fight."

Thus conversation drifted along, until there came a knock at the door.

Knocking at a door in No-Man's Land was yet an unknown quantity, and hence the patrons of the dug-out were somewhat startled.

"Wonder who the dickens that can be?" Tim Hale asked.

"Some stranger, I'll agree," replied Jim Oaks. "Ef I were you, Tim, I'd invite him in. He may be a gander worth plucking."

"I've got nothin' ter do with that part," Tim replied. "I ain't no robber myself, and so I've no shake in the matter at all. However, I'll let the feller in, whoever he may be."

So he went and opened the door, and into the room stepped no less a personage than our famous friend, Deadwood Dick, Jr.

There was only one man in Tim's place who knew him, and that man was Jim Oaks. He had seen the noted detective somewhere in the course of his travels, and immediately sprung to his feet.

"What aire you here fer?" he demanded, belligerently.

"Oh! I just dropped in out of the wet," Dick replied. "Any objections?"

"You came here to try for the gal, hey?"

"Well, yes—to try to rescue her."

"Then you will have to fight me first before Golconda," Jim Oaks averred.

CHAPTER III.

TWO BIG WAGERS ON THE RESULT.

"I'm your man!" Dick replied, "and I am likewise Golconda's man. I came here to win the girl!"

Oaks laughed loudly.

"You'll have a fine time of it!" he declared. "Why, ye little banty, ye can't lick one side of Golconda, much less me! From what I see of ye, ye can't lick a cat!"

"Try me and see" was the answer.

Oaks sprung to his feet.

"We'll see about that," he declared. "If you want a nice little racket to-night, you shall be accommodated."

"While I am not anxious for a fight, I'm the last man to back out," Dick replied. "As soon as you are ready, call around and see me. I am here!"

With this the two men made a rush at each other, and clinched.

No blows were struck at first, for it was purely a wrestling bout, in which Dick scored, by landing his adversary upon his back.

Oaks was upon his feet in a moment, however, and sparring away with a vengeance.

But his blows fell short of their mark, or were parried by Dick, whose clever boxing skill soon became apparent.

The set-to lasted about five minutes, by which time Oaks's face resembled a chunk of battered beefsteak more than anything else. Then, with a swinging right-hander, Dick laid the giant insensible upon his back.

The rest of the gang stared.

Jim Oaks had long been considered a terror in the art of slugging, second only to Golconda, and for a stranger to step in and knock him out in this style, was something wonderful in the estimation of the observers.

After finishing with Oaks, Dick turned to the gang, who had risen to their feet.

"Any the rest of you want a crack?" he demanded, savagely. "If not, have the condescension to face to the bar and imbibe at my expense; and if, by a dose of cold water, you can revive your unfortunate comrade, why he is welcome to a shout, too."

The men came to time at a jump. To refuse a treat in Tim's dug-out was equal to getting no future credit there. And credit, in a far Western town, where there is no

particular amount of loose money floating around, is not a particularly undesirable thing.

Hence the crowd immediately marched up and put their frontage to the place from which the liquid potations were to come.

Now, Tim Hale was not the man to lose a cash customer when he could avoid it, so seizing a bucket of combined water and ale-slops, he dashed it into Oaks's face, which had the effect of bringing him to his senses, for he sprung to his feet, after an endeavor to recover from the deluge that had been poured over him.

"Who doused me?" he demanded.

"I did," replied Tim. "The feller as did ye up, he wants ye to hev a drink with him, if you have no objections. He has invited the rest o' the boys, an' would like ter hev you j'ine 'em!"

Jim Oaks arose to his feet in astonishment.

"What, he offer to treat me, after giving me the worst lickin' I ever had?" he ejaculated. "Why, darn my skin, I never heerd of sech a thing. The feller must be a saint, or suthin' of the sort. Say"—walking up to Deadwood—"you ain't an angel, are you?"

"Well, I've never been credited with being one," Dick replied. "You ought to know. You've had a specimen of my beauty, and ought to be able to determine upon its merits. However, if you are in the least inclined to step up and have a smile, it is at your disposal."

Oaks stared.

"I wish I had a round little sum of money," he said, "and I'll be darned if I wouldn't back yer gall. Ther' ain't a man, 'cept it is Golconda, what ever did me up before, and ef I had the sponds, why, I'd just bet two to one that you kin lick Golconda all holler!"

"I'll take that bet, if you can git any one to back it," spoke up the voice of a man who had abruptly entered the room.

"Thomas Thornton!" ejaculated some one.

"Yes, Thomas Thornton," was the laconic rejoinder, "and the man who is going to own the Singing Bird, if you please."

The speaker was a tall, powerful man, of perhaps forty-eight years, with a full beard and hair of light-brown color. He was well dressed, and really rather imposing of appearance. One particular of his personal appearance was the lavish display of jewelry he wore. Diamonds flashed upon his shirt-front, on his finger, and the gold-headed cane he carried contained an extra-sized diamond set in the head.

The observation of Thornton appeared to nettle Oaks, for he spoke savagely.

"Well, you can bet your sweet-scented socks you won't get the gal, Mister Thornton. Ye may have more money than any other galoot in Beaver City, and put on a lot o' more lugs, but you sha'n't have Singin' Bird. I ain't afeard of ye, and I'll swear ye dassen't meet Golconda yourself!"

"Oh! I've no intention of entering the contest, sir," Thornton replied, loftily. "Gentlemen never fight. They simply bet!"

"I wish I had the rocks," retorted Oaks, "an' your offer wouldn't go a-beggin'!"

"Your money would do you no good," Thornton replied, "for, rather than see the Singing Bird sacrificed to a pack of ruffians, I will buy her out and out. What is your price, Rocks?"

"No sell!" the red-skin replied. "Go to Golconda. He tell!"

"But, Golconda refuses. It is for you, the girl's master, to say!"

"No sell! No say!" replied the stoical red-skin. "Man gets girl who beats Goll!"

"But, man, I'll give more for the girl than you can realize," persisted Thornton. "In the first place the girl is not yours, to begin with. In the second place, you have no

legal power to auction her off in this manner!"

Old Rocks sucked away at his grimy clay pipe, with a placid grin.

"No law in No-Man's Land!" he said. "I'm as rich as you, backed with gun, 'cep' you more money than me. Girl not for sale. Want her, fight for her!"

Rocks was no fool, as everybody in Beaver City was forced to admit. He always had an eye to business, and so had his son. They appeared to hold some secret relating to Singing Bird, it occurred to Dick, by which they hoped to profit, even beyond the gladiatorial exhibition, the admission to which was to be five dollars. As it was expected that a very considerable audience would be present, it was reasonable to suppose that the receipts would be very large.

"I'll give a thousand dollars for the girl!" Thornton said, drawing a wad of bills from his pocket.

Old Rocks looked at the money for a moment, with a greedy glitter in his eyes.

Was he going to accept the offer?

Dick hastened an intervention.

"Don't you take it, old man!" he said.

"Let the girl be contested for. Rather than see her sold outright, as a slave, I'll agree to pay double any amount this man may offer, and fight for the prize in the bargain!"

Rocks sucked away at his pipe and said nothing.

"Evidently you feel greatly interested in this girl," Thornton remarked, turning fiercely upon the young man.

"Yes, presumably as much as you do!" Dick replied. "Although I have never met the young lady, I have reason to believe that there are unscrupulous designs against her, and I am inclined to protect her so far as lies in my power. Does that satisfy you?"

"In other words, you have come here to meet Golconda?"

"Exactly!"

"Well, you can meet him if you like, but you won't get the girl. I'll bet on that a cool thousand to five hundred that he does you up so finely that you'll be glad to take a quiet sneak out of Beaver City, never to return."

"Is that so? Well, I'll just have to take that bet, if we can agree on stake-holders."

"Oh! I guess there won't be any trouble about that. There are a few reputable citizens in Beaver City, if it does bear a bad name, and I flatter myself I'm one of 'em. Then, there's Jim Lane, the town-marshal, whom every one knows to be as square as a die!"

"Well, he is that. Lane is one of the squarest, upright men we have in No-Man's Land. He's settled more disputes, and endured more fightin' an' hardships to settle 'em, than any man in The Strip," said Tim Hale, from behind the bar.

"What is your opinion of Lane?" Dick asked, turning to the Bully, Jim Oaks. "You ought to know something about him, if anybody does."

"Yes, I know him," Oaks replied, "and he knows me, an' tho' I can't say we're particular friends, I'll do Lane the justice o' sayin' that he's honest, and a game man. He likes sport as well as his next door neighbor, and I don't know of any other man in Beaver who w'u'd be fixer fer holdin' stakes, than Jim Lane. Oh! Lordy! don't I wish I had some money to bet!" This to his pals.

"Who would you bet on?" Dick asked.

"On the feller, and the only one who ever give me a lickin', yourself!"

"Well, if you can make a bet with Mr. Overbearing Thornton, I'll back you!" Dick assured.

A murmur of surprise ran through the assemblage, in Tim Hale's dug-out, and the young man from Deadwood became an instant favorite.

Thornton was evidently a game man, too, for he instantly inquired of Dick:

"Well, sir, how much do you want to back the man's opinion for?"

"Any amount you like!"

"Make it another thousand, then, even money!"

"Correct. Where will we find your stakeholder?"

To the evident surprise of all, the man required suddenly appeared.

The door opened, and therein entered Jim Lane, the marshal, and—Golconda, the Gladiator.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLIND MAN.

ABOUT a mile from Beaver begins a long narrow gulch, which runs southward, until it crosses the line into Texas.

Throughout all No-Man's Land, there is scarcely a more undesirable place to travel, especially at night.

On the night which opens our story, a man was slowly picking his way through this gulch, in the neighborhood of and toward Beaver City.

He walked with two stout canes, and came from Texas-way.

Although the distance is long, he had evidently succeeded in covering the most of it on foot, for his shoes were badly dilapidated, and his garments once of costly texture were well worn and much the worse for the raging storm.

This strange traveler in a comparatively unknown land, and who had threaded this labyrinthian passage for many a mile, was totally blind!

His only guide was his sticks, and a few directions he had received on the way, at an occasional cabin.

"He was a man of about forty-five, with a once muscular but, now, bent figure, and with a kindly expressed face, what could be seen of it, from his broad-brim hat down to his immense long black beard.

Something in his appearance indicated that he had seen better days, and was no ordinary tramp.

The night was one of the worst ever known in that usually mild latitude—rain, sleet, then snow, and more freezing rain, assisted by a fierce, howling "norther"—the traveler's and rancher's dread.

Finally when within but two miles of Beaver City, where he began to catch the breeze that swept over the hills and meadows of buffalo grass, he sunk down a mass of rain-soaked, almost frozen, humanity.

"My God! I can go no further!" he moaned. "Must it come to this, that I must perish, without finding here what I came for—here in this wild country? They're here—he's here, and she's here, but, oh! Good Master, I have not strength to reach the place, when I, old Scott Anderson, can place millions in her hands. And Pryer and the Injun know it—that the mortgage is due tomorrow at sunset. Oh! my Good Gracious Creator, must I, a poor sightless human being, perish here in this manner? Have mercy! Let me release Birdie, and then I will willingly die. Why did I leave that man who said he was a detective? I would not believe him then, but I was wrong. I left him, but he said, 'You remain here, and I'll find your daughter if your story is correct.' But even then I was disinclined to believe him. Oh! I want to get to Beaver City so bad, to make my will, so that if this man Bristol is true to his word, my child will know all and have the money!"

The old man tried then to rise, but fell back prostrate.

"Yes, it's death this time, sure. God have mercy on my soul! I was never a sinful man, and have borne my affliction like a true Christian. Thus I will die. Oh, my child, I shall never meet you, much less see you!"

He then turned over, face to the earth, to die.

But that was not destined to be his fate.

There was a slish-slash of horse's feet in the slush; then a scared horse came to a halt where the blind man had sunk down. In a moment a lithe, girlish figure, clad in semi-male attire, slipped from the saddle.

"My God! is he dead?" she asked.

She was strong, though by no means a tall or heavily built person, but with wondrous nerve and effort she at last had the old man laid across her saddle, and then went on toward Beaver City with her wholly unconscious charge.

The girl who had rescued him was the Singing Bird!

CHAPTER V.

THE BLIND MAN'S INQUIRIES.

THE Singing Bird and Golconda were expert riders, hunters and trappers, and what little time they spent out of the saddle was mostly spent in exercise that developed strength and agility.

Straight to her own sod-house in Beaver City she brought the stranger, who was still unconscious, and laid him out upon her own bed with as much apparent ease as if he had been a child.

Then she went out and put away her horse in a queer extension of this old building, after which she returned to restore her forlorn charge, if possible, to consciousness.

Her bed stood near the fireplace, in which she soon had a cheery fire; and, after divesting herself of her own rain-soaked garments for dry attire of her own sex, she proceeded to try to bring the old man to his senses.

He was beginning to show signs of returning consciousness, as the heat of the fire thawed him out; a little whisky poured down his throat, and a little vial of ammonia held to his nostrils, soon had the effect to arouse him from his lethargy.

"Where am I?" he demanded, staring about with his sightless eyes.

"Oh, you're all safe," Singing Bird replied. "I found you freezing to death in the snow. Who are you? Can you not see?"

"No, I am blind. I am generally known, in Texas, as Anderson, the blind man. I have never given my real name to any one, since, by a flash of lightning, I became blinded."

"And why not?" the Singing Bird asked.

"Because, being rich, there were plenty who were eager to get hold of my money. But"—and here the old man emitted a strange laugh—"but I eluded them! I put away my money, and since have led the life of a blind vagrant, wandering here and there in search of my poor child who was stolen from me—me, a poor afflicted man—for the sake of getting my money from me. Cruel, was it not?"

"Indeed it was! Your real name is not what you are known by?"

"No. Let me touch your face, to tell me what your character is, and then, perhaps, since you have saved my life, I will be able to tell you more of myself."

"How so?"

"Because, though the blind cannot see, their touch tells much. If you will permit me, I can very nearly describe you after shaking hands with you and passing my hand over your face."

"I don't believe it. Here's my hand. What do you make out of that?"

The blind man with an effort sat up on the bed.

"Give me the other hand—your right one!"

She gave it to him.

He took it in his right, and with the index of his left, he traced a "trail" over the palm.

"Hum!" he said, thoughtfully. "What's your name, my dear friend?"

"Singing Bird."

"That is red-skin. But you are white!"

"How do you know?"

"That don't matter. The blind have a power of divining things, possessed by none others of the human race. Let me see. You are between seventeen and eighteen years of age."

"Yes."

"Dark-brown hair, and complexion very fair?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. You're no Injun. Who claims to be your father?"

"Old Rocks, the Navajo. He is the only person who lays claim to me."

The blind man pondered a moment, as if trying to recall his past life.

"You don't know his Indian name?" he asked.

"I think it is like—let me think—something like Wausauka, but I am not sure."

"Do you remember your early youth and where you first lived?"

"My first remembrance was among the Navajoes, when they were at war with the Comanches. Then I was but a child, perhaps four years old. Later we moved into the Indian Territory, where I was known as the white squaw, and where I received a fair education from the Government schools."

"But, you are no Injun!"

"That is not for me to say, because I know nothing of my birth, except what I have told you."

"Have you never seen a looking-glass?"

"Yes."

"Would to God I could see one. You remember nothing of your mother?"

"No, or of my father either, unless Old Rocks is the man. They are the only parents I have ever known—Rocks and Esle, who was killed and scalped. There the remembrance of my past ceases. Of the other part of my life, I hardly remember, except we were among the Indians."

"Do you remember what your mother, or your supposed mother was like?"

"Injun!" Singing Bird said, laconically. "She was not my mother, and I often told her so, for I had not her nature. She was genuine Injun, and I don't believe there is any Indian blood in my veins. I am white."

"I believe it. You are white. I knew that the moment I touched your skin."

The blind man was silent for a few minutes, as if trying to recall memory.

"Strange!" he said, at last. "And yet—"

He did not resume his train of reflections, but continued:

"Is there such a man in this place as Thomas Thornton?"

"There is."

"What is his business here—what does he do?"

"Well, I can't say as he has got much of a business. In fact, he don't do anything, himself, except gamble. He always appears to have lots of money though."

The blind man shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh! yes, he's got the money!" he said, "but the thing is, *how* did he git it? Curse him!"

"I don't know I'm sure how he got it."

"He robbed *me* of it, curse him, and I will have my revenge, even if I am a blind man."

Then, after a pause—

"Yes, Pryer robbed me. But, blind as I am, I will not allow him to beat me. I shall know my girl directly; they can't fool me. Give me more of that whisky. I will pay you well for it, when I get stronger."

"When a sick stranger comes to No-Man's Land, we don't make it a practice to charge for drinks, if he has the appearance of a gentleman."

The drink was produced, and soon the old man passed off into semi-sleep, yet muttering—

"Singing Bird! My girl's name was Birdie. It cannot be possible it is the same."

Then, after a pause—
 "There is a bare possibility, yes, a bare chance that I am right."

CHAPTER VI.

FIXING THE WAGER.

THE entrance of Jim Lane and Golconda was an unexpected arrival, on Tim Hale's part, for he and Lane were not on the most friendly terms. Golconda was a frequent caller, and his entrance caused no particular surprise.

Large in frame, with swelling muscles, he was a picture of physical strength. As for color, he was about the same as Old Rocks, with the exception that his forehead and chin were slightly lighter.

He had a fine mustache, beautiful hair, and was really as fine a specimen of an athlete as you would want to meet.

Whoever has heard of No-Man's Land, has no doubt heard of Sheriff Jim Lane, for he was one of the pioneers, in this strange country—a man of forty-two, stalwart and broad-shouldered, with a full brown beard, hair of the same hue, and a friendly expression of countenance.

Yet when "riled" he was a bad man to deal with, and therefore, was not very popular. But, he was honest, so if any match of any sort was to come off at Beaver, Lane was chosen referee and stake holder when bets were up. His decisions were not only quick but reliable.

It therefore appeared strange to the frequenters of Tim's place that Thornton should select Lane as his stakeholder.

"Lane!" he said, "here is a chap who proposes to tackle Golconda to-morrow, and wants to back his opinion with some money. We want a stakeholder, and have decided that you will be mutually acceptable to us, in case you are willing to act."

"Very well," Lane replied. "I'll act for you if you wish. When the gent puts up his entrance-fee with me, I will assume charge of the stakes, and award them to the best man."

"My money is ready," Dick replied. "Here's my entrance-fee, and here's the amount for the wager."

Explanation was then made as to the amounts and conditions of the wagers, after which Thornton, *alias* Pryer, placed his share of the stakes in the sheriff's hands, and papers were drawn and signed, binding the bargain.

This was really not essential, as no formal contract holds valid by law in No-Man's Land. If a man contracts a debt, it cannot be collected of him unless he is really honorable enough to pay it, or is forced to do it, at the muzzle of a pistol.

During the signing of the papers, Golconda looked on in silence. When Dick appended his signature (he signed "R. M. Bristol," the gladiator looked the detective over narrowly.

"Deadwood Dick!" he ejaculated.

"The same, or, rather, Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"I am glad to meet you," Golconda said, extending his hand, "and, although we are to contest for the championship, I hope we shall not become enemies, whoever wins."

"No need of that," Dick replied, accepting the proffered hand. "By the way, how many contestants are there to be?"

"I can answer that question better in the morning, my friend," was the reply. "At present you are fourth on the list. All the entries will be declared in the morning."

"Very well. Will the prize be visible before the contest?"

"No, but she will be present at it."

With this Golconda, accompanied by the sheriff, left the dug out.

A little later Thornton left; then, asking the rest of the gang to "have something," Dick also took his departure.

Before he left, he had a few words in private with Jim Oaks.

"Well, what d'ye think of him?" the latter demanded, as he proceeded to fill his pipe.

"He's a fine-looking specimen of manhood, in my estimation."

"Do you think you can best him?"

"Well, I can try."

"The odds are ag'in' you as well as me. Thornton will put up a good man, for he intends to have the Singing Bird, by one means or another."

"He will have to work for her," Dick said. "Who will he put up?"

"No one knows, I reckon, 'cept it is himself. There's several good men he kin hire, but, I allow none of 'em is an all-round match for Golconda."

"Well, to-morrow will tell the tale," Dick replied, "and then we will know. At all events, I don't intend that Thornton shall have the girl. I don't like the man."

"There's mighty few in Beaver that does, 'cept they like him for his money. He ain't got any more friends than he needs, even if he has got more money."

"Is he so very wealthy?"

"Waal, I can't say how much, but common report has it that he's got more money stowed away than any man in these parts. However that may be, he's allus flush, and I've known him to put up a thousand dollars on the turn of a card. That's big money for No-Man's Land."

"Yes, I should say so."

"Darned hard times heer, but I am in hopes o' makin' some money to-morrow."

"Well, I hope my prowess will enable you to do so," Dick replied.

From Tim's to the only hotel in the town, that was respectable enough to bear the name of hotel, was a walk of five minutes; but, owing to the still driving storm, Dick covered the distance in half that time.

Warming himself, he retired to his room, and tumbled into bed.

"I've a lot to do to-morrow," he muttered. "I must do double duty, win my wager, and work up the case that brought me here. I must hunt for my blind friend, for Jackson must be here. I know he has not lagged on the way, blind as he is. Revenge is his guiding incentive, and I don't blame him."

"I fancy I solved the matter, immediately upon my arrival. This girl Singing Bird, may be the lost heiress. If so, then Old Rocks, as they call him, is Waukesha, the Navajo, and this man who calls himself Thornton, is Nick Bray, forger, kidnapper, and villain-at-large. Then, too, something seems to tell me that Bill Jackson has not given me the whole facts. What he has paid me as a retainer is already absorbed, and how am I to know I am to get more? Well, there is no use of fretting."

And the tireless detective quickly drifted over the borderland of sleep—sweet sleep and rest.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BLIND MAN CHANGES HIS TUNE.

THE blind man did not awake until late the next morning, when he half-awoke on the couch, and stared about him, though he could not see.

"I wonder where she is—she with the angel voice? Ah! I remember. I had sunk in the snow. I have a faint recollection of her bringing me here; after that, I talked. Yes, she gave me something to warm me up. I wonder what I said? I wonder if I gave her the false names under which I have been journeying?"

"If my man would only come—my detective, Bristol. I would feel safe. He would take care of him that is blind. Oh! if I could see, I could then pick out my enemies and my friends! But, alas! here I am, shut up in the dark, alone, forsaken."

But for my child, I would wish I were dead!"

"You are not quite alone," Singing Bird said. "I am here, to do what I can for you."

"Who are you?"

And the old man pressed his hands to his temples.

"I am Singing Bird."

"Ah! I remember. It was you who rescued me from the storm?"

"Yes."

"It was very kind of you. Did I have a talk with you last night?"

"You did."

"Relative to finding my girl?"

"Yes."

"Yes, you are right. I have a faint remembrance of it, but, will you please tell me what I told you? Give it in detail. I am, owing to my blindness, very careful not to give correct names or descriptions, or circumstances, until I have cautiously felt my way. Neither was I in fit condition last night to talk."

The Singing Bird did as requested, repeating what the blind man had told her.

He nodded his head.

"When I am not right in my mind, I am inclined to give all sorts of names. Although the general thread of what I have told you is correct, the names are not. My name is William Jackson, but I have traveled under so many *aliases* in my hunt for my enemy, that, really, it seems strange to me to speak my own name again. My enemy's name—the man I intend to kill when I meet him—his name is Nicholas Bray. The detective who has preceded me here, if he has not been killed on the way, is Richard M. Bristol. Get a piece of paper and put it down."

Singing Bird complied.

"Go on!" she said.

"Next, the name of my daughter."

"What is it?"

"Birdie Jackson."

"What next?"

"Let me see. I am in Beaver City?"

"Yes."

"I must get to a hotel. Is there one here?"

"Yes, but it is no place for you. You are not able to be out yet, so you had better remain here for the day. I shall be out most of the time, but will leave you food and drink on the chair beside your bed. The most you need is rest."

"No doubt of that. I am getting old and feeble, and yet I am going to kill Nick Bray, and don't you forget it! I have sworn to that!"

"Murder is a terrible thing, sir."

"True, but no worse than stealing a man's child for the sake of getting a fortune by extortion. No! no! my good child, you don't know all yet, by any means."

"Well, don't worry yourself at present. Keep as quiet as possible, and if there is anything I can do for you before I leave—I must soon be going."

"Where are you going?"

"Into town."

"Well, make inquiries for Dick Bristol, and tell him I want him. He must conduct the business if he is here. If not, you must do it."

"I?"

"Yes, you. Are you not my friend?"

"Yes. Though I seldom make friends with any one. I like you, Mr. Jackson. I will endeavor to find Mr. Bristol if he is in Beaver City."

"Thank you."

"Is there anything more I can do?"

"Find, if you can, Waukesha, the Navajo, and also find Nick Bray. I think one of the men whom I mentioned while I was delirious was one of the party I am looking for, sightless as I am. It is Bray, *alias* Pryer, *alias*—"

Here he paused.

"Well, I forget now, the other *alias*. Let me see if I can recall it."

"Is your mind wandering again?"

"Jackson's mind is all right now. Ah! I have it now. The name is Thornton—Thornton, *alias* Pryer, *alias* Nick Bray! The latter is his real name. He is the man who caused my daughter to be stolen from me. Take me to him, I want to confront him!"

"Nonsense. You stay where you are. I will find your detective if he is in Beaver, and we will work out the case. Maybe I am your daughter, and maybe again, I am not! All the same, my blind friend, I will take good care of you, until I find your detective friend. Keep quiet as you are, and, after the struggle, I will return to you!"

"After the struggle? What struggle?"

"Between the two gladiators—Golconda and Deadwood Dick?"

"Deadwood Dick?" ejaculated Jackson.

"Why, he is my detective—Bristol."

"If he's the man he is here!"

"Then I must see the contest. You must accompany me, and act as my reporter."

"All right. So it shall be," she said.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE ARENA.

It was two o'clock, in the afternoon, when the contest extraordinary was to begin, and long before that hour the town of Beaver City presented a holiday appearance.

Extra stages had been run from all available points, and brought loads of men even from sections outside of No-Man's Land.

Men from Kansas, men from Texas, reds from Indian Territory—in fact the whole surrounding country had its representation, outside and within The Strip.

Golconda, it appeared, was known far and wide, and his advertising of the contest had been done judiciously.

The big tent, wherein the test and struggle were to occur, was crowded, long before the contest was to take place, and seats sold at a premium.

It was evident that by sacrificing the sister, Golconda and Old Rocks would profit largely. Among the odd population of Beaver City, there were a few musical spirits, who had formed themselves into an apology for a brass band, and these musicians essayed to enliven the occasion with some horribly mangled notes; but, it served the purpose, perhaps, of making the long wait less tedious.

In the mean time, programmes were circulated among the audience—for there was a printing establishment in No-Man's Land, and nothing had been left undone to make the tournament a success.

Here is a verbatim copy of the programme:

"GRAND GLADIATORIAL TOURNAMENT,"

"Under the Management and Auspices of

"GOLCONDA THE GLADIATOR."

"The prize will be the sole and undisputed possession of the beautiful young Indian girl, known as Singing Bird. To win her, the lucky man must defeat Golconda at each and every one of his specialties, viz:

"1st. Collar-and-elbow, best two out of three falls.

"2d. Best standing jump.

"3d. Best time, four times race around the ring.

"4th. First knock-down, with hard gloves.

"5th. Most bull's-eyes out of ten, at thirty paces, with revolver.

"6th. Sword contest, in which the victor must win by disarming his adversary.

"NOTE:—If any one of the contestants fails to defeat Golconda in any one of his specialties, as above, he is barred out of further participation in the tournament, or claim upon the prize.

"The following are the entries:

"First. John Bailey, of Santa Fe.

"Second. Dan Lacy, of Colorado.

"Third. Thede Brooks, of Arizona.

"Fourth. Deadwood Dick, Junior."

Such was the programme.

By two o'clock the tent was so packed, that no one else could gain admission.

Then, after the band had screeched out a parting tune, Golconda advanced into the arena, leading the Singing Bird by the hand.

She was plainly dressed in black, and wore no ornaments whatever.

Her wealth of hair hung down in flossy waves over her shoulders, her eyes sparkled, and she was certainly a charming creature to look upon.

Her appearance was a signal for tremendous applause.

Golconda was attired in pink tights, which set off his splendid figure to great advantage.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he said, "I have the honor to introduce to you my sister, Singing Bird, who has freely and without undue influence, consented to become the prize offered at this tournament. If there is one among my contestants who succeeds in besting, he wins her, and wins a jewel. Understand, it is no compulsion that causes Singing Bird to offer herself as the prize, nor is it essentially a money-making scheme on my part. There are other and more potent reasons. The tourney will now begin!"

Then the band struck up, and Singing Bird ran back to his tent.

Immediately afterward Golconda's first adversary, John Bailey, made his *entree* into the arena, accompanied by Jim Lane, who was to act as referee. Bailey was a black-bearded fellow, every bit as big as Golconda, with as evil and ugly a face on him as one would seldom run across.

He was all bone and muscle, however, and being stripped to the belt, he appeared a most formidable antagonist.

To dwell upon the minute details of each contest would require too much space, so we will epitomize them as far as practicable.

The wrestling bout was won by Bailey, amid great enthusiasm, he succeeding in gaining two successive falls—first and third.

This was a great surprise to the assemblage, for wrestling had always been one of Golconda's chief specialties.

It now became noised around that Bailey was the man whom Thornton had put up, to win for him the Singing Bird, for it was well known that he had made his boasts that he would possess her.

The second round was also won by Bailey, he jumping six inches further than the Gladiator. Likewise the third, Bailey beating Golconda in the race by one lap.

It now began to look as if the man from Santa Fe was in a fair way of carrying off the prize.

Golconda, on his part, began to show signs of chagrin.

The fourth contest, the slugging match, was the most determined, both men pounding each other without mercy, until their faces were literally raw. But, as in the other contests, Bailey won, by knocking Golconda clean off his pins.

The excitement now became intense, and, leaping to his feet, Thornton shouted that he would bet ten to three that Bailey would win.

He found only a few takers, however, and the bets were small.

Golconda got up rather "groggy," but still game.

He looked like accomplishing very little in the revolver contest, but, to the surprise of everybody, came to time with nine bull's-eyes out of ten shots.

Bailey only scored four, and retired from the arena.

Dan Lacy was next on the list, and when he came forward he proved to be a stalwart young fellow of about twenty, but, plainly no match for the Gladiator, for, inside of two minutes Golconda had him flat upon his back, which ended his chances in the tournament, and he, too, retired from the ring.

Thede Brooks, who had a good reputation

in Arizona as an all-around athlete, next came forward in fine form, and tackled the Gladiator; but Golconda was too much for him, for, in the slugging contest, he knocked Brooks senseless, and he had to be carried from the ring.

"Now trot forward the last man!" cried Golconda, triumphantly. "Trot him forward, I say. He's the man I want to meet—the famous Deadwood Dick, whom report says no man ever overcame! Watch me, and see me do him in two jiffys, and then Singing Bird is still mine, and goes to the highest bidder."

"Whoever wins, I challenge the winner!" shouted Jim Oaks.

"For how much?" demanded Golconda.

"The girl, and a thousand dollars," was the reply.

"Bah! where's your backing?" demanded Golconda. "Money is what talks!"

"The money is already in my hands!" announced Jim Lane. "So you need have no fear."

"Very well" was the reply. "So be it. But, set your heart on one thing, Oaks: the Singing Bird shall never fall into your clutches. I'll fight the devil, first!"

"Maybe you'll meet one of his right-hand men, when you meet me!" was the grim reply.

At this minute, Deadwood Dick in black tights, entered the arena.

A murmur of surprise went up from the audience, when they saw the disparity in the size of the two men.

Golconda was so much taller, broader, more muscular, and bigger in every way, that it seemed simply folly for a man of Dick's physique to enter the arena against him.

But, the plucky detective hesitated not in the least, no more than though he were to meet a man of his own size and weight.

"I am ready!" he said. "Are you?"

"I am."

The next minute they clinched.

The contest between the big giant and the little giant had begun.

CHAPTER IX.

DICK WINS AND LOSES.

It is safe to say that there was not one among the audience, who did not expect to see Dick thrown immediately upon his back by the young Gladiator; but their expectations were not fulfilled, for, minute after minute passed, and neither man had gained a fall, although they struggled hard for the throw.

The excitement became intense, and many of the spectators arose from their seats and cheered lustily.

To see a giant like Golconda unable to land a much smaller man, was a treat indeed.

To the much greater surprise of all, Dick succeeded in landing his opponent on his back, three times in succession, after a struggle of a quarter of an hour.

The betting now became more lively, and the stakes were larger.

Deadwood Dick was slightly the favorite.

In the second contest he won by about an inch, according to Referee Jim Lane.

That Thornton, as we shall still continue to know him, had plenty of money, seemed certain, for he made his way to and fro among the audience, laying his wagers on Golconda ten to one.

The race was easily won by Dick, he being the lighter and more agile of the two. He won by three yards.

Next came the pugilistic contest.

Now, said the audience, the little fellow will be sure to get knocked out.

But, again they reckoned without their host.

The two men sparred for several minutes, without either scoring a hit; then, with one tremendous blow, Dick caught Golconda un-

der the left ear, and knocked him senseless to the ground.

Two of the Gladiator's trainers ran forward and proceeded to apply means to restore him to consciousness, while the audience applauded vociferously.

One man from Arizona, an old-time sport, remarked to the man sitting next to him:

"Thet war the purtiest thing I ever see'd. I know thet feller, by ther great ham-bone, but I never see'd him do et up so before." Then, rising to his feet, he yelled:

"Three cheers and a tiger for Deadwood Dick, prince o' detectives, and boss gladiator o' No-Man's Land!"

And they were given with a vengeance.

This party who had proposed the cheers no one appeared to know, that is among the audience; but, idly leaning against the ropes, awaiting Golconda's recovery, Deadwood Dick recognized him—a thin, weazened-up little old man, with stoop-shoulders, gray straggling beard and hair, no ears, and a face half-serious and half-comic of expression.

Clad from tip to toe in buckskin, he looked a thorough frontiersman, as he was, for this was Old Avalanche, the Great Injun Annihilator, well known from Dakota down to Mexico, and no doubt a familiar figure to the many regular readers of the "Deadwood Dick" romances.

It was fully five minutes before Golconda was fully restored, and able to stand upon his feet. He then felt of his swelling jaw, and advanced and extended his hand to Dick.

"Shake!" he said. "You deserve much praise, for you are the only man who ever knocked me out in one round. If you win the other two contests, Singing Bird is yours, and if we have to part with her, I would rather you would have her than any one else. I expected to win her myself. Maybe I shall, yet!"

The rifles were then produced, and the target placed in position.

A coin was tossed, and Golconda won the lead.

He shot with careful precision, and succeeded in scoring eight bull's-eyes out of a possible ten.

It was Dick's next turn, and the audience watched and listened breathlessly.

Ah! bang! ping! bang! ping! bang! ping! bang! ping! bang! ping! bang! ping! bang! ping! bang! ping!—and a jet of flame exuded from the rifle at every touch of the trigger.

The smoke around the marksmen cleared away, and then Golconda shouted to the marker:

"What's the last score?"

"Ten bull's-eyes, straight!" was the reply.

Golconda then threw down his rifle, and cried out:

"Bring in the swords!"

Then turning to Deadwood Dick, he added:

"I have this to say, sir: You have won every point but one; I shall give you half the gate-money. Furthermore, I extend to you my everlasting friendship."

"Accepted," Dick replied, with unaffected heartiness.

No more words were exchanged, for the trainer appeared with the swords. They were not Damascus blades, by any means, but just ordinary regular army blades, such as would seem a mockery in the hands of a gigantic being like Golconda, whose fencing prowess was well known, far and near.

Dick and the Gladiator faced each other, and one clash of steel was followed by another, and the sparks flew from the weapons like shooting stars.

Feint! parry! thrust!

But, neither of the contestants seemed to gain much vantage ground, in the first ten minutes.

This could not last, however, and by the

end of another five minutes, Dick succeeded by a powerful blow, in snapping Golconda's blade off near the hilt.

Which left the young giant at the mercy of his adversary.

"Vanquished!" Golconda said, throwing down his stub of a sword. "The Singing Bird is yours. If you have to meet Jim Oaks, *kill him!* He is a ruffian!"

Then, turning to the audience, he said:

"Ladies and gentlemen: I have been fairly and honestly defeated, by Mr. Deadwood Dick. He is therefore winner of the Singing Bird. If Jim Oaks proposes to fight the winner, let him step forward!"

But no Oaks materialized.

"He withdrew his wager," said Jim Lane, "and left the tent, a few minutes ago."

Golconda gave Dick a startled glance.

"Come with me! There's something wrong!" and he dashed away toward Singing Bird's dressing compartment, Dick following closely at his heels.

The moment they entered the little tent, a horrible sight met their gaze.

Lying upon the ground, was Old Rocks. Several knife wounds upon his body proved that he had been murdered.

But, this was not all; Singing Bird was gone.

A slit in the side of the tent showed how her egress had been made.

"She's been kidnapped!" Golconda cried in dismay.

"It looks that way," Dick assented, "but, by whom, do you think?"

"Who else, but Jim Oaks?"

"In his own interests?"

"Maybe, and again, maybe not. Oaks is a man whom money will buy. Thornton is a man who will pay money, to those who will serve him. Anyhow, this murder must be avenged, and Singing Bird rescued."

CHAPTER X.

GOLCONDA EXPLAINS.

THE two men stood confronting each other in silence for a few minutes.

"Was he your father?" Dick finally asked, pointing to the dead Navajo.

"He claimed to be," was the reply, "but I've always had my doubts about it."

"Well, what shall we do first—give out a general alarm?"

"I will leave that for you to say. You are a detective, and ought to be able to handle the matter better than any one else."

"I don't know about that. Your sheriff, Jim Lane, knows the camp and its surroundings far better than I do."

"Yes, and the camp, and every other one in the Strip knows Lane. He's not popular with toughs of the Oaks type. He's dropped too many of 'em in free fights. No, we'll put on our clothes, hide Old Rocks under a blanket, and then go and dismiss the audience. After that we will have a chance for the other work."

The donning of their regular habiliments over their tights was quickly accomplished, and they then entered the arena.

Although there was Indian blood in Golconda's veins, he was fairly well educated and a fluent speaker, so when he arrived in the ring, he glanced over the audience, the most of whom yet remained, and then bowing, said:

"Ladies and gentlemen: I have the honor to address you a few parting remarks."

"Your kind patronage to-day was larger by half than I had anticipated, and while I lost the tourney to Mr. Deadwood Dick, I beg leave to say that he met me fairly and squarely."

"My receipts from this tourney net me more money than I ever before possessed in my life. What was my gain in this way was Deadwood Dick's loss in another. While we were finishing up the closing acts of the tourney, that villain, Jim Oaks, left this tent, entered my sister's tent, killed my

father, Old Rocks, and kidnapped Singing Bird. I will give five hundred dollars to the man who restores to Deadwood Dick the Singing Bird, and presents to me the scalp of Oaks, or his person, dead or alive.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you are dismissed, with my repeated thanks for your patronage!"

There was some applause and a great deal of excitement as the audience dispersed.

Golconda, Jim Lane and Dick proceeded at once to the little tent from which Singing Bird had been abducted, and held a long consultation.

"Where do you think Singing Bird has been taken to?" Dick asked of the sheriff.

"Well, that is pretty hard to say. This is a queer and a tough town. There are more houses and dug-outs as would house a prisoner than there are that won't."

"Them places over ag'in' the hill, half-dug and half-sod frontage, shelter some purty tough characters, and Jim Oaks is a shinin' light among 'em!"

"How about Tim Hale's?" Dick asked.

"Well, that's a pretty tough place, but Tim knowed I'd investigate him, and therefore, I don't reckon he'd take in Oaks with the girl. I came near getting him lynched, a year ago, by exposing him, but, I am not in favor of lynch law, and, since then, his den has been run more quietly. He fears me, and knows that I would run him out of town if I were to catch him in any monkey business. That's why I don't think the girl has been taken there."

"My reward offer will most likely set a pile of people searching for Oaks, you think?"

"Yes, I reckon so, but the chances are they'll have their labor for their pains. This job wasn't did on the spur of the moment. It's been planned out hours before the tournament commenced!"

"What makes you think so?" Dick asked.

"For this reason: Oaks is not able to support himself, much less a woman. Then, too, it was not Oaks's money that was put up in my hands, on that bluff wager."

"Oh! it wasn't eh? Whose was it, then?"

"Thornton's. I saw him give it to Oaks."

"Ha! then it stands to reason that Singing Bird was kidnapped for Thornton."

"That's my think!" the sheriff replied.

"And I agree with you," Dick returned.

"I came to No-Man's Land to find two persons, one of whom is wanted in the States, on numerous charges, chief among which is wholesale forgery, and abduction. The man is supposed to be in No-Man's Land, and there is no doubt in my mind but Thornton is the person I seek. His true name is Nick Bray, I think, and that is the man I want. Can you tell me anything about how this Thornton acquired all his money?"

"I allow he had a big lot of it, when he first came here," Lane replied. "Then, too, he's made a lot by lending money to poor farmers. I've known him to take all of a farmer's earthly possessions, by main force, and sell them at auction, in order to satisfy a small note. If the goods brought ten times more than the face value of the note, it was all the same. The villain pocketed the entire proceeds of the sale."

"Oh! he's the man I'm looking for without doubt," Dick declared, "and if such be the case, he has good reason for wanting to get possession of Singing Bird, whose name is not Singing Bird, but, instead, is Belle Jackson!"

As he spoke, Dick was covertly watching Golconda; and saw him give a start.

So he pursued the topic.

"This Belle Jackson, when she was a mere babe, was kidnapped from her father, who was blind, by this scheming man, Bray, alias Pryer, alias Thornton, and Heaven only knows how many other aliases."

"Knowing that Jackson could not live to old age, Bray foresaw that by possession of

the daughter, he might get a big slice of Jackson's large fortune, when the girl grew up and he married her."

"I have known that Thornton has long had a great desire to get possession of my Singing Bird. I call her my Singing Bird, because I love her—once loved her as a brother, but since I have found out her parentage, I love her as a lover. I do not know who I am, but I don't believe I am in any way related to Waukesha. There may be Indian blood in my veins, but it's not all Indian."

"I don't believe it is," Dick asserted.

"That's neither here, nor there," Lane interposed. "If we are going to find the Singing Bird, it is time we began the search. My idea is, that we had better work separately."

"I second the motion!" Dick assented.

"Yes, it will be best!" said Golconda.

Just then, Dick's mind reverted to Old Avalanche.

"I had an old friend in the audience," he said. "I want to see if he still remains. He is very clever in my line."

He darted out into the main tent.

Only those whom Golconda had employed still remained; Avalanche had gone with the crowd.

This rather surprised Dick, who had expected the Annihilator to seek him out:

When he returned to the tent, he said:

"My friend has gone, but I will find him and put him on the trail!"

"Well, I can't do much now. I must attend to the corpse," Golconda said. "You two can go to work at once, however—the sooner the better. My reward offered will hold good!"

CHAPTER XI.

REFLECTION.

ACCORDINGLY, Dick and Lane left the tent, and separated, Dick going to the hotel, and to the room assigned him, on his arrival.

Here he took a bath, and a good rub-down, and, having no bruises or wounds to nurse, he once more felt like himself, again.

Then he sat down to think. How should he go to work, to find the Singing Bird?

Wholly unacquainted with the topography of No-Man's Land, he was not prepared to do any very shrewd detective work.

The denizens were different from ordinary people, their habits were different, their methods were different, their habitations were different, and their hatred implacable.

Having no redress, so far as their grievances were concerned, except by the rifle, revolver or shot-gun, they were not exactly a congenial class of people to meet.

Who were the ones to take under surveillance? he asked himself.

Jim Oaks, of course, for one, and Thomas Thornton, *alias* Nick Bray, for another. But, who else? Perhaps, John Bailey, or some of the gang at Tim Hale's might know something about the matter, but this was somewhat doubtful.

Oaks had evidently taken the girl either for himself, or for Thornton, but, for which one of them?

That was the question.

Which did Oaks care for the most?—the girl or the money which Thornton would give for possession of her? The money, Dick desired.

The detective now opened his big trunk, and looked over his large and motley stock of disguises; then surveyed himself in the glass, and then re-examined the stock that had served him in so many different adventures.

He then gazed in the glass again.

Should he part with his mustache, which was just getting out so as to look like something?

Yes, in order to carry out his plans, that

would be necessary; so, seizing his razor, off came the hirsute in a jiffy, and the change in his appearance was complete.

It was a disguise in itself.

Knowing this, and that he had only been but a few hours in No-Man's Land, Dick concluded it non-essential to wear any beard.

He then arrayed himself in a fine suit of black, patent-leather shoes, and a plug, and, armed with a gold-headed cane, he sallied forth.

Doc Gray had hitherto been the only man in Beaver City who was allowed to wear a plug hat; hence, the audacity of Dick's breaking the rules surprised even the oldest citizen.

It was, in their minds, Simon-pure impudence; but some of the crowd recognized in that dude, the hero of the arena, and the word passed along the line to let him alone. A man who could ring ten out of ten bull's-eyes, was not to be trifled with.

So Dick escaped a bullet through his hat.

Dropping into several resorts to see if he could get a glimpse of Jim Oaks, he made for the house of Thomas Thornton.

"I may be able to catch a clew," he said to himself. "If Thornton is Bray, I am pretty sure to detect the fact!"

CHAPTER XII.

BEARDING THE LION.

WHEN Dick arrived at Thornton's residence, and rapped at the door, a woman servant answered his summons.

"Is Mr. Thornton in?" Dick asked, "or John Bailey?"

"Mr. Thornton is in. John Bailey is not living here."

"Well, I want to see Mr. Thornton."

"Wait," said the servant, "who shall I tell Mr. Thornton wishes to see him?"

"A gentleman."

"From where shall I tell him you come?"

"Simply say that an acquaintance wants to see him."

The servant closed the door abruptly in his face, and Dick had to remain fully ten minutes before he got an answer.

At last the servant appeared.

"Mr. Thornton will see you," she said, stiffly. "Come in, sir!"

Dick entered, and was conducted along the hall, to a back parlor, and bidden to take a seat.

"Thornton will be in directly," she said, even more stiffly than before.

The room was rather nicely furnished, the most conspicuous piece of furniture being the safe.

Thomas Thornton entered directly, and regarding the caller steadfastly for a moment, abruptly said:

"Well, sir, I have not the honor of your acquaintance—what do you want?"

"I asked to see Mr. Thornton," Dick responded, warmly, "but should have said Nicholas Bray, as I believe you are. Will you inform me where Mr. Bill Jackson lives?"

"Bill Jackson? There's no such man here in Beaver City that I know of, and I never heard of Nicholas Bray!"

"Nor ever heard of Mr. Jackson, I suppose?"

"I know nothing of that person."

"Would you like to have Bill Jackson produced before you, and let him declare who you are, and what you have done?"

"Not the least objection in the world," was the retort.

"As you have the Singing Bird, maybe you will consent to have her present at the interview?"

Thornton laughed at this.

"You have a nerve," he declared. "What do you suppose I know of the whereabouts of Singing Bird? You won her—you should know where she is."

"Oh, you know me, then?"

"Why not?" Thornton exclaimed. "I'm not a fool. I sized you up the minute you first came into my presence. If I am a rogue, as you intimate, then I am smart enough to beat you. I know you are a detective, and have been offered a price to put up a job on me. Go ahead and do it, and see what the result will be!"

"Do you intend that for a threat?" Dick coolly asked.

"You can take it as you please," was the reply.

"You deny that you know anything of Jackson?"

"Absolutely nothing!"

"You are an unmitigated liar!" Dick replied. "Bill Jackson is in this camp, as I believe, and Belle, his daughter, has mysteriously disappeared. You are the author of the disappearance."

Thornton stared at him—rather, glared at him.

"Well, as far as Bill Jackson is concerned, or Belle Jackson, or any other Jackson, you will have to inquire of some of the members of the Jackson family, for you will not find out anything there, that is sure!"

But Dick was not to be bluffed, and persisted:

"You know where Singing Bird is, and I want to know. It was through your instrumentality that she was kidnapped, and now I want to know where she is!"

"You will have to ask some one that knows," was the response. "I know absolutely nothing about it. If she was kidnapped, it was by some one else than me. The chances are that she ran away, in order to escape becoming your victim!"

"Oh!" and Dick smiled, sarcastically. "That is a nice idea, Mr. Bray, but, it won't work. If you don't tell me where the Singing Bird is, I'll find her, and I'll make this town so hot for you that you will wish you had never seen it!"

"Bah! I don't fear you," was the taunting reply. "You may be a gladiator, and all that, but I stand in no fear of you. If you ain't very careful, I'll have you fired bodily out of town, with tar and feathers in the bargain."

"It will be you who gets fired," Dick replied, grimly. "It may be that you do not know where Bill Jackson is, but I am certain you do know where his daughter is. I will give you just two hours to decide whether you will tell me or not. The girl belongs to me, by the terms of the contest, and I intend to have her. Further, I mean to help Bill Jackson recover what your villainy robbed him of, through the agency of the Navajo. I also mean to see the man whom you employed to kill Old Rocks, strung up like a horse-thief."

"Having accomplished this much I drop out, and you can have a turn with Golconda, on account of Old Rocks. You will find him an interesting person to deal with. With this prospect before you, don't you think it would be advisable to throw up the sponge and tell me where Singing Bird is?"

"You will have to excuse me," with defiant irony.

Dick eyed the man a moment, in silence. His effrontery was sublime. His face was as mild and serene as that of a country deacon.

Dick arose.

"Very well, Mr. Bray," he said. "I will bid you good-by—but only for a short period. You will see and hear from me later."

He then left the house, feeling not entirely satisfied with the result of his interview, for he really had gained nothing, more than a conviction, stronger than ever, that Thornton knew of, and was concerned in the abduction of the Singing Bird.

The next thing was to hunt up the habitation of the Singing Bird, for Dick had un-

derstood from Golconda that she occupied a sod house of her own.

Inquiry soon developed where this was located, and Dick made for it.

Perhaps, after all, she had gone to her home, through fear!

When Dick arrived at the door of the sod cabin—he rapped, loudly.

"Come in!" came in faint tones, from the interior.

Dick pulled the latch string, and entered. Bill Jackson was sitting before the fire, warming his feet.

"Who is it?" he demanded, turning his sightless eyes toward the door.

"It is Bristol," Dick replied. "But, how in the name of heavens do you happen to be here?"

"I came all the way from Santa Fe, on horseback, until I got within a dozen miles of here; then my horse threw me, and took the back trail. I wandered on, and finally, totally exhausted, I sunk down in the snow, to die, expecting no relief. But, just then along came an angel, in the shape of a young woman, who put me on her horse, and brought me here. She went out awhile ago, and has not returned!"

"Do you know who she is?"

"I could not see her, but, from what she said of her past, I believe she is my long lost daughter. What have you discovered, since you have been here?"

"I have found Nick Bray, in the man Thomas Thornton; I also found your daughter, in the person of the Singing Bird. I also found Waukesha, the Navajo, but he is now dead, and the Singing Bird has been kidnapped, at the instance of Bray. I came here to see if I could find any trace of her."

"She has not been here since early today. Good God! do you really believe she has fallen into Bray's power?"

"I don't know what else to believe."

"What move do you propose to make next?"

"I have not determined. I hardly know what to do. If Thornton has got the girl, he will be crafty enough to keep her, and it will take pretty shrewd maneuvering to defeat him, for, mind you, he is no ordinary villain. He knows that I am a detective, in your employ, and you can bet he will play his trump cards to defeat me at every point."

"Well, I hope to God you will find her," Jackson said. "Although I cannot see her, she will surely be a great comfort to me in my old age."

"Find her I will, if she is to be found," Dick replied. "In the mean time you remain here and do not show yourself about town. If you do there is liable to be other trouble in the camp. Keep the door locked, and admit no one except four knocks are given on the door. I will leave you, now, but will return as soon as I have any news."

Dick took his departure.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ANXIOUS SEARCH.

FOR hours Dick wandered here and there about the town, yet no tidings of Singing Bird.

The reward offer of Golconda inspired the whole populace, but not one of the searchers had picked up a clew.

Singing Bird had effectually disappeared; so had John Bailey; wherefore the presumption that, at the instance of Thornton, Bailey had kidnapped her.

The next question was, had she been taken away from Beaver City?

If Bailey had kidnapped her for himself, the chances were she had; if for Thornton, most likely not.

During his wanderings, Dick ran across Golconda.

"Any news yet?" he asked.

"None. The search, so far, has been fruitless."

"Are you satisfied in your own mind, that Thornton is the author of her disappearance?"

"Perfectly. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, but I could gain no information. He knew me even in this disguise!"

The next day passed, and the next, but, although the searchers were many, no trace of either John Bailey or Singing Bird could be obtained.

Dick, assisted by Golconda and Jim Oaks, who was now eager to serve his friends, took turns at keeping a strict surveillance upon Thornton's house and over his movements, but the result was the same—no result at all.

On the third day the first clew came, and in this wise:

Dick, on passing along the street, espied a letter, which he picked up, and extracting the inclosure from the envelope, it proved to be a rude map of Beaver City, of which the following diagram is a fair copy:

x Song Bird's House

.....Street.....Hotel.....

x Dale's

x Thornton's

x

The mark to which no name was affixed at once attracted the detective's attention.

What did it signify?

It was a problem worth investigating.

Dick carefully studied the map, and in a short time reached what he considered was the place indicated.

It proved to be one of the typical dug-outs of the town. Its entrance was guarded by a heavy oaken door, which was locked.

Repeatedly Dick rapped, but got no answer.

He tried to look in the single window, but that was too dirty on the inside for him to see through.

"No go here, that's evident," he muttered. "If any one lives here, they either don't intend to open up, or else are not at home."

He then took a look around the neighborhood, but no other habitation corresponded with the mark on the map.

Finally he started to return to the heart of the town, when he encountered Jim Oaks.

"Who lives over there?" and Dick indicated the dug-out he had just visited.

"No one now. Hank Hopper did live there, but he's dead for three months."

Dick then showed him the map, which Oaks studied a moment.

"It means Hopper's place," he decided, "and here goes to investigate the hole."

Reaching the dug-out, they rapped again and again, but no answer.

"There's no one here," Oaks decided.

"Were you ever in this sumptuous residence?" asked Dick.

"No, but I've been told it runs back a good ways into the hill. When Hopper was alive, there used to be a counterfeiting gang in Beaver, and this was their headquarters."

"That is enough! We must explore the place."

"All right. Here goes. All together!"

They threw their combined weights against the door, which gave way at once, and the two men tumbled in with it.

The place did not differ materially from the ordinary dug-out of Beaver City.

The floor was of hewn logs, the walls, in the front-room were of sod.

There was a door leading into some interior place, but this was fastened with a padlock.

The front-room was about ten feet square.

There was no furniture, but plenty of cobwebs, and dirt or dust lay like a carpet on the log floor.

No sooner were their first observations made than both uttered exclamations, for in

the dust were footprints, of three sizes, and evidently had been recently made.

The first was that of a heavy pair of stogy boots, about elevens in size; the second that of a pair of eights, and the third a pair of what was evidently women's threes.

"How long ago did you say Hopper died?" queried Dick.

"Three months, to-morrow. He got into a brawl over cards, and some one gave him a dig in the ribs with a bowie. I had the honor of attending his funeral."

"Has this place been locked up, ever since?"

"So far as know."

"These footprints, then, mean business. As I read them, the big ones indicate Bailey, next size are Thornton's, and the small ones are those of Singing Bird. Don't it look that way?"

"It surely does."

"Then, let's explore, further. We may not find the girl, but we may find some clew."

The door leading into the inner apartment was not a strong affair, and they had no difficulty in forcing it open, to see before them a long passage, dark as dark could be.

"This looks as if we were about to enter Hades," Oaks commented.

"This is suggestive of something more," Dick decided. "Fortunately I have matches, so if we can find anything to serve as a torch, we'll explore."

A brief search disclosed among a lot of rubbish, a greasy can, at which Dick rejoiced.

"Good! Kerosene!" he ejaculated. "The can is half full, too."

"But, where's your lamp?" queried Oaks.

"We can dispense with that. A piece of dry sod, saturated with the oil, will answer. Find one."

Oaks hurried from the room, and was gone a short time, when he returned with several pieces of sod, which were quite dry.

One piece was saturated with the oil, placed on an old shovel, and then ignited, and gave forth a bright light.

Dick taking the lead, and Oaks following with the light, the two men entered the passage, to soon debouch into another room, from whence came a sickening stench.

Were they in a charnel-house?

CHAPTER XIV

PUERTO.

AN instant search soon reached the source of the stench—the body of a dog which evidently had been dead for months.

"About as I expected!" Oaks said, with a snort of disgust. "No Singing Bird here."

"So it seems," Dick replied, disappointedly. "But—ha! look here, will you! She's been here, in this foul den, I'll swear!"

And stooping, he picked up a strip of pink ribbon.

"She wore this, at the tournament!"

"Yes, I remember it. She had it in her hair!"

"Exactly. It was the only ornament she wore. We may find another clew. Look sharp!"

And they did, after they had replenished the light.

It was a scrap of paper containing but a single word, and that word written in blood. It was:

"Puerto!"

"Where is Puerto?" Dick asked, quickly.

"Ten miles from here, on the Beaver River!" Oaks answered. "It is one of Thornton's places. It used to belong to the Reds!"

"Then, Singing Bird is there, for this chirography is hers I believe. Hasten, Oaks, and hire two good horses. I will foot the bill!"

Oaks hastened away, and, in a half-hour's time returned with two saddled horses.

When Oaks returned with the horses, he looked decidedly serious.

"Do you know where Golconda is?" he demanded abruptly, as he came up.

"Not exactly; I suppose he is about town somewhere."

"I have looked for him, but can't find hide nor hair of him."

"What do you want of him?"

"There will be need of more than two of us, if we go to Puerto. Hard crowd there."

Dick meditated a minute.

"Well," he said directly, "you wait here, and I will see if I can find him. If not, I'll go for Jim Lane."

"Nix!" Oaks demurred. "We don't want him. He is working on the side his bread is buttered the best."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I was once a fairly educated man: I know a few things yet. My reputation here, I will admit, is not good, but when I clinch to a feller, I never go back on him. I believe Lane is workin' to throw you off the trail!"

"Give us your reason for that idea."

"You remember that there was money put up in his hands?"

"Yes."

"And it was suddenly withdrawn and the better disappeared, and directly afterward Old Rocks was found dead, and Singing Bird had disappeared?"

"Yes; all very true."

"Thornton backed his man—in your eye! Bailey returned the money before he left, no fear!"

"But, how do you connect Lane with the matter?"

"Money talks. Did you ever know a public officer, big or little, who did not like the feel of boodle?"

"Well, there's something in that, maybe."

"You bet! And when I went for the horses, I saw the two havin' a confidential interview in Kelly's saloon over a bottle of wine."

"Anything strange in that?"

"Why, them two men have been bitter enemies for over a year."

"Indeed? Then you think Lane is in collusion with the other?"

"I'd stake my life on it!"

"If that is the case we must work carefully. I'll find Golconda, if he is in town. We won't be beaten by treachery if we are by force."

Dick hastened back into the heart of the camp.

About a hundred yards from the hotel a gigantic rock towered twelve feet high.

It is yet known as the Hayden Rock, having been so christened after Professor Hayden, the geologist, who visited the country some years ago.

Its top is only to be reached by a flight of stone projections, resembling steps.

Indian tradition of The Strip says that the top used to be the throne of the Great Manitou, and there it was where Dick discovered Golconda.

He was seated upon the edge of the crest with his legs dangling over, and his face buried in his hands.

Dick clambered up the rude steps, and advancing stealthily, he seized the giant under the arm-pits and hauled him back on the rock.

Golconda was astounded.

"You here?" he ejaculated, arising.

"Yes, I'm on hand!" Dick replied.

"What in the name of common sense are you doing up here?"

"Thinking!"

"Thinking? Of what?"

"Of Singing Bird. There is a superstition that any one who comes up here to think will recover a lost friend."

"Well, have you found her yet?"

"No! not yet."

"Nor are you likely to, sitting up here. Come with me!"

"Where to?"

"Puerto."

Golconda brightened up.

"Have you news?"

"A clew, I think."

Dick then explained.

"I believe she is there."

"No doubt of it. Lead ahead!"

The two men then left the rock, Golconda going for his horse.

During his absence Dick purchased a repeating rifle and ammunition, and half-an-hour later the party were off.

The ride was a tedious one, up-hill and through sage-brush, but, finally, Beaver River was reached, and then Puerto soon came in sight—a long, low building of adobe on the bank of the river, which at that point runs very swift.

The house was surrounded by some very good farming-land.

Oaks explained that the farm was let out, on shares, to a man named Heep, brother of the Heep introduced in our first chapter.

The principal products of the farm were corn and rye, and these were converted into whisky, there being a still on the premises.

When the trio came within sight of the house, Oaks ordered a halt.

"We'd better consult before we go any further," he said. "Old Heep has five or six men working for him and they are tough—eh, Gol?"

The Gladiator nodded.

"If the men are at the still, we are all right. If not, we shall have to use strategy. The still is over in the woods, yonder. You two stay here."

Oaks then dismounted, and stole away, and it was a full hour before he returned.

"It's all right!" he announced. "There's no one in the house but old Heep's woman! Come on!"

And they rode on toward the rakish-looking building, prepared for fight if necessary.

"Do you know Mrs. Heep?" Dick asked, of Oaks.

"Yes, quite well—all I want to know of her. She's as treacherous as a cat, and a fit mate for the old man. He's what you might call a corker!"

The trio reached the door of Puerto.

"Dismount, and follow me!" Oaks ordered. "I know the racket to work. Give me ten dollars, Bristol. We will drink!"

"I'll supply that," Golconda said, tossing him a gold piece.

Then Oaks knocked at the door, which was opened by an old woman of vinegary aspect.

"We want some bug-juice, mother," Oaks said. "Can we come in?"

"Shure, sor!" was the reply.

And they entered.

CHAPTER XV.

DICK DECIDES TO FOUND A "CITY."

Mrs. HEEP was a thin, angular woman, with a face fallow, wrinkled, and severe.

The interior into which the three were conducted was a big roomy apartment which served as a kitchen and general living room.

The furniture was scant, and of the rudest manufacture.

There was a rousing fire in the stove, for the day was raw and cold, and drawing some stools near the stove Mrs. Heep said:

"Sot down, boys. W'isky is it?"

"You bet!" Oaks replied. "It's nasty out."

"Cussed nasty."

The old woman took a bottle from a cupboard, and poured out three well-filled glasses.

"You will find that A 1," she averred.

"The old man knows how to manufacture the prime stuff—better than anything you can get in Beaver City."

And serving the drinks, she remarked:

"I know you, Jim Oaks, and I know Golconda, but I don't know t'other feller. Who is he?"

"A One!" responded Oaks, "the same as your whisky. He's a billionaire from Europe, and has come here to establish another city that will knock Beaver into a cocked hat. Your chances will go up fifty per cent. The gent's name is Gifford, and if you treat him on the level you will find him O.K!"

"Every one is treated on the level who comes here," assured the old woman, with a spice of pride.

"No one doubts that, ma'm! You ain't no slouch, as plenty can vouch for. Eh! Golconda?"

"You're right," responded the Gladiator.

"Many's the drink I've had here," went on Oaks.

"Well, I propose we have another," suggested Dick, "and that Mrs. Heep joins us, if she does not object!"

"I never refuse!" was Mrs. Heep's response, with a horrible grin.

The drinks were had—and another, and still another.

Hardy men, the liquor did not have any particular effect upon the trio of girl-hunters, but it was different with Mrs. Heep.

She soon began to show evidences of being in a decidedly jolly mood.

"Where's the old man?" asked Oaks.

"Over at the still."

"And Tom?"

"Dunno. In Beaver, I reckon!"

"Seen anything of Singing Bird, lately?"

"No'p!"

"I heard she was boarding here."

"Not much, I've no use fer boarders!"

"You would, if they paid well!"

"Well, that might make a difference. I reckon the old man might make a kick tho'!"

"I don't think so. My friend, Gifford, wants board, while he looks over the lay of the land around here."

"The old man won't refuse him, I guess."

More drinks followed, and Mrs. Heep became hilarious, to the extent that she offered to dance the fandango with Golconda, who promptly refused.

After performing an impromptu jig herself, Mrs. Heep turned to Dick.

"How much do you want to pay for board?" she demanded.

"How much do you want per day or week, madam? I may be here one week, I may be here six. It all depends on what territory I can get for my town site."

"I'll call the old man and he'll tell you. The old man runs things here!"

She then seized a shell dinner-horn and blew a loud blast.

"That'll fetch him!"

And it did; in five minutes' time the old man appeared.

He was a little, weazened face personage of sixty, with a hooked nose, ferret eyes, white hair and beard.

When he entered he "sized up" the visitors, seemingly at a glance.

"Well, what's wanted?" he demanded.

"We're havin' a smile," Oaks replied, "and have brought you a customer!"

"What kind of a customer?" still suspicious.

"This gentleman," explained Oaks, pointing to Deadwood Dick, "is a capitalist, who proposes to found a town here, or in the immediate vicinity, that will knock Beaver City higher'n a kite. He's got the sugar to do it with, too. A town here will be sure to raise still profits, eh?—save transportation, and other expenses. Am I not level?"

"Fact. But, who is this man? Is he level?"

"Square as a die! While he is prospecting and planning he wants to get board. Can you give him room and meals for a time?"

Heep glanced at his wife.

"Well, I don't know about that," he answered. "What d'ye say, old woman?"

"Well," responded the other half, "I'm

not kickin', ef he are willin' to put up with the grub. He seems to like the juice, and maybe we can fix him up on fodder."

"It would be a grear favor to get accommodations in this neighborhood!" remarked Dick, "and probably I can add somewhat to your fortune. Some of the plot for my town I shall probably buy from you, and in case we can come to an agreement, I'll guarantee that you shall have the sole wholesale liquor interest in the place. After deciding on my plans, I think I can have a hundred colonists here within a month, the foundation of the town I propose to start. More will follow, and you, the only liquor man allowed in the town, will be all the richer for the monopoly."

Old Heep's eyes fairly sparkled with the excitement of greed.

"The gentleman can have accommodations here, to be sure!" the venerable sinner assured, blandly, and at the nominal expense of fifty cents a day, all he wants to drink included. If he starts a town here, I'll give him mighty good figures, for then my business will be good. Old woman, give us some out o' that bar'l of four-year-old. Don't take any yourself, for I allow you hev been knockin' off the profits of late. Yer nose is gitten as red as the midnight sun, what we read about!"

"Look at yer own!" fired back Mrs. Heep. "You have nothing to brag of. Yer nose are like a peony in full bloom, you old hummer!"

"Well, Mr. Heep, I will accept of your terms," Dick said, "and go you fifty cents better. I don't want accommodations for nothing. Boys," turning to Oaks and Golconda, "I shall remain here. Come around and see me in the morning."

"We will!" Oaks declared.

Then they arose and left.

Dick was now alone with the Heeps.

And a "heap o' trouble" was before him!

CHAPTER XVI.

TROUBLE—SERIOUS TROUBLE.

THE three talked late, Dick essaying to obtain some clew or information to aid in his adventurous search, but very little information was forthcoming.

Finally the old woman had fallen off asleep and the old man was beginning to nod.

None of the men had yet come from the still.

"My opportunity will soon be at hand," thought Dick.

But, he was mistaken; the old man soon aroused.

"What time is it?" he demanded.

"Eleven o'clock!"

"We'll have a drink."

And they had it.

Then, the old man dropped off into what was apparently another doze, but, Dick was now suspicious; Mr. Heep was not the sort of a man to go to sleep if he was guarding a secret.

And that was what he was doing, to the best of Dick's belief.

As the minutes flew by things began to grow exceedingly monotonous, so Dick arose and paced the floor.

Turning sharply, once, he caught Heep watching him, steadfastly.

As soon as the old chap saw that he was discovered, he yawned, and apparently went to sleep again.

"Ha! I thought so!" muttered Dick; "I am suspected of being a spy!"

Old Heep was not asleep, but Mrs. Heep was.

There could be little doubt of that, for she was snoring most vigorously.

In his tour about the room, Dick made a discovery.

A bottle of laudanum on a little shelf, among other medicines.

"Ha! now I'll fix him!" the adventurer muttered—and he did.

Watching his chance, he poured some of it into old Heep's glass and filled the glass up with whisky, after which he aroused the sleeper.

"Let's have another drink," he said.

"K-rect!"

And drink they did.

"Good whisky?" Heep declared.

"Bully, sir. Never tasted better!"

Then the old sinner passed off into another apparently sound sleep.

While Dick waited patiently, and while waiting for the drug to take effect, the detective resumed his walk-around.

There were three doors opening off the kitchen—one leading out of doors, the others into another part of the house.

These latter he tried, but found that they were locked.

An hour passed.

"I wonder if old Heep is asleep?" Dick queried, now thoroughly impatient.

So he went and shook Heep.

"What d'ye want?" was the drowsy demand.

"I thought maybe you was asleep."

"Nix!"

"Want more whisky?"

"Yes."

Dick had the laudanum handy.

This time he put a full teaspoonful of the drug into the liquor, which Heep swallowed at a gulp.

"That will put him to sleep, unless he has got a cast-iron stomach!" thought Dick.

But he was wrong; the laudanum seemed to have no more effect on Heep than so much water; rather, it seemed to liven him up, although it was evident his mind was not quite clear.

"Old woman!" he said directly, but with eyes closed.

"Well?" Dick responded. "What d'ye want?"

"Whisky!"

"Haven't you had enough?"

"Never git enuff—never! Mine is (hic) the best in the country, ain't it?"

"Old man, you're drunk!" said Dick, in as near imitation of Mrs. Heep's voice as possible.

"Who's drunk, you old fool?"

"You are!"

"Well, what ef I am? Et's my drunk, ain't et? Gimme some more whisky."

"If I don't settle you this time, I'll fix you in another way!" decided Dick.

It was now after twelve o'clock!

The boarder now put at least a tablespoonful of the laudanum into the glass, and then the whisky.

"Now, drink that and go to bed," he said.

Heep swallowed the charge without opening his eyes.

Then, after a bit, he asked:

"Where's the feller?"

"What feller?"

"The cuss that's goin' ter build a town!"

"Oh! he's gone."

"Gone where?"

"To bed, you old fool! Where d'ye suppose?"

This to all appearances settled him, for he soon began to snore like a soldier.

Still, Dick was not fully satisfied that he was asleep, until he saw him fall forward on his face, on the floor.

As this did not arouse Mr. Heep, it was evident that he was "knocked out."

So taking a look at the old woman the detective proceeded to make his investigations.

The first and most important thing was to get the two doors open.

A search of the pockets of the Heeps, failed to disclose any keys.

The doors were fastened with a peculiar kind of locks and were very strong.

Not knowing what time the men from the

still, might arrive, Dick had to work very cautiously and quickly.

The outside door was without a lock; when fastened, it was barred on the inside.

Dick adjusted the bar; then seizing a poker, he proceeded to pry out the staples in the casing of one of the inner doors.

It was not an easy job, for they were strong and well driven in, but he succeeded finally, however, in opening one door.

Just as he did this there came a terrific knock at the outside door.

What was to be done?

There was no place to hide, for the door he had opened only disclosed a blank wall.

It was a moment for action, if ever.

In one corner stood a club. To seize this and advance to the door was the work of an instant.

"Who's there?" he demanded, seemingly in Mrs. Heep's voice.

"Me!"

"Who are you?"

"You ought to know my voice, mom!"

"You're not Tom!" replied Dick, who distinctly remembered Tom's squeaky voice.

"No, I am not Tom. I'm Thornton."

"What d'ye want, at this hour o' night?"

"We want to come in!"

"Who d'ye mean by we?"

"Tom Thornton and the Vigilantes."

"What d'ye want? The gal's all secure."

"Not sure of that. Besides, you've got a visitor we want to have business connection with!"

"Well, we're to bed. Come in the mornin'!"

"Nix! Open the door or we'll open it devilish soon, you can bet on that!"

Dick drew his revolvers, but concluded to continue the parley.

"Who is with you?" he demanded.

"No matter. If you don't open the door we will open it for you," was the answer.

"Open the door, then, if you dare!" Dick cried. "Whoever pokes his nose in here, to-night dies!"

The windows of Puerto were high, and almost impossible to reach, and too small for either egress or ingress of a man's body.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE INSIDE.

FOR awhile there was a silence outside, and apparently there was a consultation, for soon there was another rap.

"Open that door!" was the peremptory demand.

"Not an open!" was the retort from inside.

"Then we will break in! So here goes!" and then came a crash that seemed to shake the house.

"There! Again, boys!" cried Thornton's voice.

"Come ahead!" cried Dick, now thoroughly aroused.

"Then we will, you cur!" cried Thornton. "You'll not get out of there alive, no fear!"

He had evidently recognized Dick's voice, for, in fact, he knew that Dick was there.

Then came another crash, and the door began to give.

"I'll fix you!" muttered Dick, and putting his revolver against the upper panel he fired, and had the satisfaction of hearing a yell outside.

"Now try her again!" shouted Thornton.

Then another crash, at which one of the hinges perceptibly loosened.

"The crisis is coming now," thought Dick, "but there will be more than one to drop, if I am forced to it."

All the racket had not served to disturb the Heeps.

Another crash and the door flew open.

Dick was standing at one side of the casement.

"Come on!" he cried. "The first one who

pokes his head inside draws the prize! Come on!"

But no one came; those unerring shots at the tourney were not forgotten.

"Come in!" Dick again called.

"Not much! We'll do better than that," was the answer; and Dick was quickly aware of what that meant, for he smelt smoke.

They had fired the house.

That settled one point. If they were going to burn the place, it was not probable that Singing Bird was there.

She was too valuable a prize to destroy.

But then there was another thing to consider: adobe, of which the walls of the house were composed, would not burn. Was the scheme, then, to smoke Dick out?

The plan was feasible, but they must alsooust the Heeps.

Likewise they were in danger of suffocating the Singing Bird, if she was in the building.

"How do you like the smell of smoke, my boy?" cried Thornton, from without.

"It agrees admirably with my constitution," was the cheerful rejoinder; "but how about your particular friends—the Heeps?"

"To the deuce with them!" was the response. "They'll have to stand smoke, sometime, and might as well get accustomed to it now."

"But, the Singing Bird?" suggested Dick.

"Do you intend to smoke her out, too?"

Thornton laughed, sarcastically.

"D'ye s'pose I am a fool? The girl is not here, you can bet your sweet life!"

The smoke was now beginning to get suffocating in the room.

Just where it came from Dick could hardly tell; it seemed to come from all directions.

Stealing to a pail of water, Dick saturated his handkerchief, and bound it over his nose.

"That will save me, for a time," he muttered. "When the smoke gets perfectly dense, I may be able to steal from the shebang!"

Hark! What were these new sounds?

"By heavens! rifle-shots! Can it be that Oaks and Golconda have come to my rescue?" thought Dick.

The firing ceased, but the smoke continued to become denser.

Dick concluded from their stillness that the Heeps had ceased to breathe and had died a painless death.

Only the wet bandage over his nose kept him from suffocating.

"This can't last much longer, or I shall croak, too," Dick concluded.

As the candle had gone out the room was in dense darkness.

"Now, there's only one thing," he muttered; "a dash for liberty or death!"

He quietly stole to the door. All was silent without, and perfectly dark—no sign of any fire, nor of anything else. That, then, was the moment for action. He passed out into the night and began to make his way to the rear of the house.

Where were the men, under charge of Thornton? If in ambush he was prepared for them—a revolver in each hand.

He had passed wholly around the building and was now well away from it when there came a tremendous explosion, the report of which must have been heard, for miles around.

It was the destruction of the old ranch

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER THE EXPLOSION.

THE explosion was something terrific.

Golconda and his friends who had attacked the Thornton gang had retreated, or rather, had been forced back some distance, but the shock of the explosion startled and alarmed them, for they well knew what it implied.

"Well, our friend Bristol is a goner now!" said Golconda, sadly

"Great ham-bone, no!" returned a voice, that of the old veteran, Avalanche. "Ther ain't powder enuff made ter blow him up!"

The old fellow must have followed close on the trail of the three riders, for there he was, sure enough!

"Nonsense! If the explosion has torn Puerto to pieces, how could he escape?"

The Annihilator shrugged his bent shoulders.

"Ye don't know the boyee!" he answered. "He's been thru fire, bullets, blood, flood, and—matrimony, and never got killed yit. Thar's no darned flies on him, no more'n was on Dick, the First! I knowed ther other Dick before him, an' tho' they was in no way related, they're both game men. D'ye know whar Deadwood is?"

"Yes."

"Waal, thar uster ter be ther stampin'-ground fer both these fellers. Dick, junior, hev traveled more than Dick, I, and hev got ther repertation of the King of Western Detectives!"

Here Avalanche paused, and took off his hat.

It was a slouch, old and ragged.

There were plenty of bullet-holes in it, and the most low-down tramp that pedestrianizes the highways and the byways of the East would have cast it aside.

Not so with Old Avalanche. He had that hat in the city of Deadwood, the day before Wild Bill (J. B. Hickok) was killed. He valued it as much as he did his famous old mule and goat, who had traveled thousands of miles with him, but alas! were now no more.

"I'll bet you my famuss old hat!" he said, regarding it fondly. "I'll bet ye my hat, which orter know the West inch by inch as well as I do, thet Deadwood Dick gets out alive!"

Golconda had to smile.

"All right. I'll go you two hundred dollars ag'in' the hat. Is it a bargain?"

"You bet!"

"Then, come on, and we will make a search. But, mind; your hat or my money!"

The light within the crumbling walls was growing brighter and brighter, for the building, or rather its ruins, was on fire.

Not a sign of human life was visible about the premises.

"If Singing Bird was in that building, she was blown up," Golconda remarked.

"Don't believe it. She wasn't there!" from Oaks.

A search was made. Three of Thornton's party were found, killed outright, apparently, by the shock, but nothing of Thornton or of the adventurous Dick.

"Nothing of Dick!" said Oaks dejectedly, after a scout around the place.

"Oh! he's a goner," replied Golconda. "We might as well go back to Beaver."

"Go on!" said Avalanche grimly. "I shall remain here."

"What for?"

"To find Dick."

"But, man, there's not one chance in ten thousand that your friend is alive!"

"Wai! that's yer think, not mine. Go back ter Beaver. I remain hyer."

"Well, one thing is certain," said Jim Oaks. "The old man sha'n't be left alone. Ef he stays, I stay, you bet!"

"In that case, I shall remain too. I see no possib'le use of it, however. So far as our real business here is concerned, Puerto is ended, and the trail has ended with it."

"Don't you believe it! Thornton never had the girl here, or he would not have blown the place up!"

"Maybe ye'r level-headed there, me boyee!" from Old Avalanche, "but, it was easy fer the scamp to have run her off from some outside hidin'-place, an' I shouldn't wonder if he was now makin' tracks fer Beaver with her

The suggestion seemed to strike Golconda favorably, and at last he decided to take the back trail to discover, if possible, if Thornton really had returned to town, and what had been his purpose in following them out to Puerto. That it was to destroy Dick was very likely, but that it was also to secure Singing Bird from the possibility of discovery and capture by the three pards, was the more probable reason.

This having been decided in Golconda's mind, he soon leaped on his horse and was gone—leaving the others to continue their search for the detective.

When he had gone, the two friends again took the circuit of the premises, resolved to follow on after Golconda if, in another half-hour, Dick did not "materialize." If nothing of his whereabouts was discovered, they could but wonder that the great detective had run his last case, and had, indeed, perished in that building, now but a smoking mass.

CHAPTER XIX.

DICK MATERIALIZES.

THE two friends, Oaks and the Annihilator, had gone well out into the brush in their search round, and were on the point of returning to the front when there came distinctly to their hearing the call:

"Boys!"

"Great ham-bone! What was that? Dicky's voice or I'm a liar!" averred Alva in a whisper.

"It's somebody, that is sure!" assented Oaks. "Most likely one of Thornton's gang, so look sharp, old chap, or we may get a dose of lead!"

"Boys!"

Again that voice, feeble but distinct and certainly not far away.

"Dick—Dick, whar are ye?" called out the old man.

"Here by the big rock!" came in reply.

Both men hurried to the spot indicated, and there, sure enough, lay the detective beside the rock, so covered from sight by the thick undergrowth around it that he would not have been discovered by any one passing near.

Alva was down beside him in a moment.

"What is it, Dicky, boy? Are you shot, or stabbed, or what? How came you here? How'd ye git cuten the buildin'? How—"

"Too many hows, old pard, for one dosel!" answered the detective, smiling. "Here I am—all right, I guess, only seem to have all the wind knocked out of me. I got out of the house and made a run for the woods, when an awful explosion came, lifting me off my feet and dashing me against this rock, and that is all I remember. Here I've been ever since in a semi-conscious state, and had just voice enough to call out to you. Lift me up and let us see how much I am hurt."

The two comrades carefully complied, and, one on each side held him on his feet between them.

"I do not think I am injured at all," decided Dick, moving his limbs, "only was just stunned by the shock."

This proved to be the fact, and in a little while he seemed quite himself again.

Oaks then explained all that had happened, as far as he could explain the extraordinary events of the night, and when Dick had weighed all in his mind he concluded that the Gladiator had done the right thing in returning to Beaver.

Certain it now seemed to Dick that the girl had not been in the home of the old distiller, at all, but, if in his keeping, had been under guard in some outside place, from which, now that Thornton had, as he thought, disposed of the detective, she had been returned to Beaver and there she would be found.

This left nothing to do but to follow on after Golconda, which they did—reaching the town to find all silent and in utter darkness.

"How will we approach Thornton's?" asked Dick, as they rode into the settlement.

"On the north. It's a big house, and the north side is the least used," replied Oaks.

"I reckon we'd better kerlect some help, and surround the shebang," the Annihilator suggested.

Oaks laughed.

"You don't know Thornton," he said. "If he's got the girl, he's bought up every tough in the town. If we were to try any funny business, we'd very likely run into a hornets' nest."

"Just my idea," added Dick. "We must gain entrance with as much caution as possible."

"Well, steer ahead!"

On they went, but, when within a hundred yards of the Thornton dwelling, they halted.

"We'll leave our horses here," said Oaks. "It won't do to ride too close."

They accordingly dismounted.

The rear of Thornton's dwelling was as dark as doom.

"I reckon we're all right," decided Oaks.

"You wait here until I reconnoiter."

He went around to the front of the house, and soon returned.

"Thornton's up yet, late as it is. There's a light burning, and we shall have to wait, unless we decide to storm the castle."

"No use waiting," Dick replied; "we're all armed, and can fight. I'll take the lead. This time we'll have the girl, or Thornton dies!"

In the rear of the house were three windows and a door.

One of the windows was not fastened.

Dick carefully raised it, and propped it up with a stick.

Two minutes later all were inside, the room proving to be the kitchen.

From this led three doors, as was ascertained by the light of a match.

One led to the cellar, another toward the front of the house, and another to the rear door.

"What's the racket now?" asked Old Alva.

"Go for Thornton in the front room where the light is."

"Second the motion," said Avalanche.

They advanced to the door leading to the front.

A glance through the key-hole disclosed a light in the next room, but that was all; there were no sounds of voices—in fact, no sounds at all.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE COUP.

"SHALL we bu'st in the door?" queried Alva.

"Bu'st it is!" responded Dick.

All threw their weight at once against the slender barrier and it flew open suddenly, precipitating all into the room.

What a sight met their gaze.

Everything was in disorder as if a terrific fight had taken place. Chairs were crushed, the table was overturned and the front window shattered.

The lamp on the mantel shed but a dim light over all but enough to show the scene of havoc.

And more; for Dick's quick eye caught the sight of blood on the floor—a trail of it leading out into the hall.

At once following this, he almost stumbled upon a man's body lying at full length there.

"Quick! boy! bring the lamp!" he called out.

Oaks was at hand, in a minute, with a light, and there lay the Gladiator, seeming dead, yet bleeding from knife wounds in a half-dozen places.

But, he was not dead, for his pulse beat faintly.

"He has fainted from loss of blood," said

the detective. "Here, Alva, your flask! A few drops of liquor."

The old man, with all the tenderness of a woman, took the head in his lap, while Dick poured a few drops of liquor down his throat.

In a little while Golconda opened his eyes, and tried to arise but was helpless and inanimate from exhaustion.

"Do you recognize us?"

"Yes," was the whispered answer.

"Don't try to talk much," enjoined Dick, "but say yes or no to my questions. Did you find Thornton here?"

"Yes."

"Were there others with him?"

"Yes, three."

"Did they have the Singing Bird?"

"Yes."

"Was she brought from old Heep's?"

"Yes."

"You fought them all?"

"Yes."

"You burst in through the front window?"

"Yes."

"Was the Singing Bird in the room?"

"Yes."

"Was she bound?"

"Only her hands."

"Where is she?"

"She escaped."

"During the fight?"

"Yes."

Dick turned to speak to Jim Oaks, but Jim was not there. He had placed the lamp on a near at hand chair and had vanished, completely, evidently having left the house, for he did not respond to the detective's calls.

Golconda fixed his eyes appealingly on Alva.

"What is it, pard?" asked the old man, bending low, to catch the faint whisper.

"Oaks—gone—to—rescue—sister. Tell—Dick—go—to—to her dug-out—quick!" and with that he lapsed into total unconsciousness again.

Old Avalanche was greatly excited.

"Quick, boyee!" he cried to Dick. "Off for the gal's house! Golconda's dead gone again, but said before he fainted to follow Jim. You'll be wanted there—great ham-bone, yes! Wished I could go, but I must stay hyer with ther brave boyee. He musn't die—not if the old man kin help it, an' I guess he kin."

Dick needed no other prompting. Out of the front door he bounded, away in the gloaming of the now early morning, and, in a few moments neared the dug-out, to hear yells, pistol-shots, shrieks. Then, out of the door came a commingled mass of humanity, four men engaged in mortal struggle, writhing, striking with fist and knives.

Dick rushed up to behold Jim Oaks in the grip of three ruffians, who were dealing him death-strokes.

Quick as a flash spoke the detective's revolvers—one—two—three! Each shot struck a brain and the three men of Thornton's gang dropped in their very tracks.

"In there, pard!" cried Jim, as he tottered and fell.

Dick did not await to see to Oaks, but sprung into the room.

The Singing Bird was crouched in one corner, still, and seemingly dead. In the center of the floor were two men—Thornton on top of the old blind man, his hand on his throat, choking him to death.

A blow from Dick's revolver butt knocked the villain senseless, when he at once snapped a pair of manacles on Thornton's wrists.

At that moment in came a number of men of the town, aroused by the pistol-shots headed by Jim Lane, the town marshal.

"What in Heaven's name does all this mean?" he demanded, fiercely, confronting Dick with drawn revolver.

All the others apparently fierce for revenge, had drawn their weapons and the detective

was literally hemmed in with leveled pistols.

"It means," replied Dick, undauntedly, "that the career of that detestable villain—murderer, thief, counterfeiter and abductor, that he is—is ended, and that you, men of No-Man's Land, when you know the whole truth, will make short shrift of Thornton and all his gang. They tried to murder Golconda, they have slain Jim Oaks, they stole that poor girl and run her off to Old Heep's, they blew up the Puerto and so killed both Old Heeps and his wife, and that old man lying there, who is the real father of Singing Bird, Thornton was just on the point of strangling to death when I knocked him senseless and put on the manacles."

"Men of Beaver City! I am a United States detective!" and throwing back his coat he displayed his badge—"I simply ask you now to see that that scoundrel does not get away, and to help me look after the Singing Bird and her father. They both may be dead but I hope not. If we can save them you shall then hear from their own lips, what wrongs they have suffered at the hands of Thornton, and you yourselves shall decide what shall be his fate."

"Is that a fair proposition?"

"In course it is!" assented the town marshal, and with that, pistols were all replaced in belts, and the now good-natured crowd lent all assistance to Dick and the marshal to restore the girl and the blind man to consciousness.

The old man soon came to, but Singing Bird was in a deep swoon. She was uninjured, bodily, but, overcome with fatigue and fright she had sunk into that condition of suspended animation which rests over the border land of death.

A full hour Dick and his assistant labored and waited; then, with a low sigh, the heart action was renewed and in a little while she was conscious again.

When the eyes unclosed, Dick was holding her hand and bending over her.

At first she was startled and affrighted, but, in a moment, realized that she was in good keeping again.

"You are with your friends, now, Singing Bird," said Dick, reassuringly, "so be of good heart."

"Yes!" was all she answered, but the look of peace upon her sweet face assured the men that all would be well with her in a little while.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SURPRISE PARTY.

THORNTON was taken to his own home by the crowd. He had regained his wits and was made to walk. How he anathematized the men around, who, from once having been his tools and admirers, now jeered at his downfall! Some he roundly cursed—some he pleaded with to be relieved of the manacles; but, following the marshal's orders, "to shoot down the first man who attempted to set him free," the "chief" of Beaver City was held a safe prisoner in his own house.

The crowd arrived there to find the old Annihilator still watching beside Golconda. They soon learned from him the whole story of that exciting night's work, so far as he knew it, and when they, in turn, told him of the tragedy at the dug-out, the old fellow's eyes blazed balefully.

"By the horn of Joshua!" he cried, stepping up to Thornton, handling his knife, uneasily, "I'd like to send you to kingdom come; but, that must be Golconda's privilege, if so be the poor feller ever gets on his legs again."

The young Gladiator did get on his legs again, but only after weeks of suffering, and long after the miserable wretch, Thornton, had been sent to his doom by the mob of Beaver City, who bewailed the fact, that

the diabolical scoundrel had but one life to take.

The investigation which followed the recovery of the Singing Bird and her father gave to the people all the facts in Thornton's career, and with papers found in Thornton's house and safe—which Dick thoroughly overhauled—the detective established not only the girl's identity as the blind pilgrim's child, but so substantiated the charges against the villain of having robbed the father of both daughter and fortune, that, by common consent, all of Thornton's possessions were turned over to the wronged and persecuted old man.

Poor Jim Oaks! His one redeeming trait was his manly love for the Singing Bird and his devotion to her cause. He died in her defense, and was buried with all the honors of a great public turn-out.

Following his burial, his friends commenced a hunt of the men who ran Old Heep's distillery, and had thus participated in Singing Bird's persecution. And though all the men of No-Man's Land loved whisky, and regretted to limit its production, there was not a vestige left of the still, or of the hut to which the girl had been taken for imprisonment, by Thornton's orders, up among old Heep's mountain lairs.

If Singing Bird ceased to be the Gladiator's sister with the proof of her identity, it was only to substitute the dearer tie of the one best beloved. All through his illness she was his nurse and companion, and when, one day, a stray parson rode into Beaver City on a tour of observation for fresh fields of Gospel labor, the crowd "caught on" to a new idea, immediately.

As a consequence the new occupants of the Thornton Mansion were amazed by the appearance of what seemed to be the population of the entire city and region round about. It was a hilarious *en masse* gathering, and halting in its march in front of the house the marshal stepped forward.

On the porch sat Golconda in an easy-chair, Singing Bird at his side, and the old man sitting contentedly near.

"Friends and feller-citizens!" shouted the marshal from the steps, "this yer' city's a-boomin'! A Gospel-slinger have arrove, an' we perpose to give him a chance to play his keerds in fu'st-class style. It's the notion of this community that a raal squar' an' fair weddin' is ther fu'st thing on the program' an' that Golconda an' the Singin' Bird shall be united, fer better an' wusser, in the bonds of mattermony. You who ar' in favor of the dispensatory say ay!"

A tremendous yell went up. A flock of old hats filled the air. Pistols cracked like a mad jubilee, and all along the line black bottles came forth for a general guzzle.

Nor was order restored until the affrighted parson had been led upon the porch, and the astonished lovers were being made man and wife in the orthodox Methodist style.

And when the ceremony was performed, pandemonium seemed unloosed, during which the parson, white-faced, escaped by the back-door, and, remounting his horse, he headed for the border, nor stopped until well over the line in Kansas, evidently having made up his mind that the pastures new of No-Man's Land could be better worked by some missionary more accustomed to black bottles and revolvers.

That Golconda and his suddenly-made bride were pleased with that genuine surprise-party goes without saying. Their only regret was the absence of Dick Bristol and his faithful old friend and follower, Avalanche. Both the Gladiator and his lovely wife had learned to more than admire the brave, chivalrous, upright man, Deadwood Dick Junior had proven himself to be, and it will be a happy day for them both if the fortunes of his restless life ever again waft him to No-Man's Land to become their guest. He and Avalanche took their leave

the very next morning after Thornton had expiated his crimes on the Judge Lynch gallows, making their way at once to Kansas City, where duty called.

THE END.

Beadle's Dime Library.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

- 390 The Giant Cupid; or Cibuta John's Jubilee.
- 422 Blue Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.
- 436 Kentucky Jean, the Sport from Yellow Pine.
- 452 Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.
- 473 Gilbert of Gotham, the Steel-arm Detective.
- 499 Twilight Charlie, the Road Sport.
- 519 Old Riddles, the Rocky Ranger.
- 557 The Mountain Graybeards; or, Old Riddle's Greatest Riddle.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON.

- 176 Lady Jaguar, the Robber Queen.
- 194 Don Sombrero, the California Road Gent.
- 202 Cactus Jack, the Giant Guide.
- 219 The Scorpion Brothers; or, Mad Tom's Mission.
- 223 Canyon Dave, the Man of the Mountain.
- 227 Buckshot Ben, the Man-Hunter of Idaho.
- 237 Long-Haired Max; or, The Black League.
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